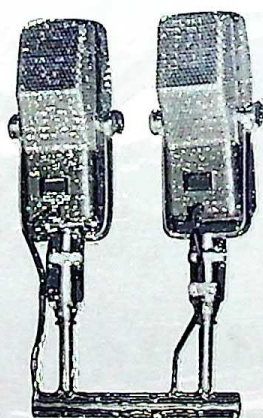


Radio Kashmir

And my days in
Broadcasting



Pran Kishore



सत्यमेव जयते

सरहद, पुणे

RADIO KASHMIR
&
MY DAYS IN BROADCASTING

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Pran Kishore

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K ABOUT AUTHOR

Pran Kishore Kaul, versatile writer director of theatre, television & films, attained a place of pride, amongst the doyens of broadcasting, like Melville De Mellow, S.S.S. Thakur, Devki Nandan Pandey, K.K. Nayyar and others who were categorized as 'Outstanding Drama Voices' by All India Radio. He has produced more than two thousand Radio Plays, Features and Documentaries, during his long tenure as Senior Producer in All India Radio.

Winner of the coveted Akashvani Annual Awards, quite a few times, Pran Kishore was nominated as a member of The International Jury for XXXth PRIX ITALIA, (the most prestigious International Festival for Radio & Television) held in Milan, Italy in 1978. In this very festival, his award winning Radio Documentary, 'Aab Ta Hayath' was also All India Radio's Official entry. The following year, this very documentary was selected for Asian Broadcasting Union Festival, held in Kuala Lumpur.

With a Sahitya Akademi Award for his novel 'Sheen Ta Vatapod', Pran Kishore created history by his television serial, Gul Gulshan Gulfam, based on his classic novel by the same title, considered as an epic, in Kashmiri prose. Pioneer in film making in Kashmiri language, his film 'Mainzrat' won President's Silver, in the National Film Festival as the best regional film in 1965.

Pran Kishore has been awarded, Robes of Honour by The Jammu & Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages and The University of Kashmir for promotion of drama and theatre, in the state. Besides, many national and international recognitions, he has been given the State Award by the Government of Jammu &

Kashmir for Performing Arts. In recognition of his lifetime achievements and meritorious service to Art & Literature, the President of India has conferred upon him, the PADMA SHRI in 2018.



EDITOR'S NOTE

1924 – ‘A Passage to India’ – E. M. Forster’s seminal novel is published. In this novel, Forster, through one of its main characters, laments, “there you have it, the essential Indian – absolute inattention to detail.”

1926 – . Pran Kishore Kaul is born. And in everything that he does, even today, at 92, gives a fitting reply to Forster’s generalization as can be seen through his wonderful book *Radio Kashmir & My Days in Broadcasting*.

Through this book Pran Kishore effectively shows us that an Indian can look at his surroundings, note interactions and also record observations in a minute and absolutely impartial manner. This book skillfully brings to the reader’s attention the fact that the more an autobiography is meticulously written in an unbiased manner, the more it engages you. As it progresses, you are riveted to its pages, wanting to know more and more and more. Pran Kishore’s memoirs are written like a novel, bringing open and enclosed environments alive as he describes people, events and specific personalities with an eye for detail. The ‘I’ in this book is that of Pran Kishore but through its pages the ‘I’ becomes part of the happenings, so much so, that the reader is aware of the author being there and not being there at the same time.

In a dictatorship, progress may take place because of a government; in a democracy, progress happens, in spite of a government. It is people like Pran Kishore who democratically contribute to the establishment, the execution and successful implementations of ideas and concepts once determination takes

over. Dedication, courage, straightforwardness and commitment are other significant traits that are already present in a huge measure in him, as he undertakes and brings to triumphant fruitions a number of activities. There are recordings of disappointments too, but handled with stoicism that fills the reader with admiration. A series of awards including the latest, the Padma Shri, conferred on him over years of meritorious service, have made him more humble and conscious of the fact that he is but a mere cog in the wheels of the Time Machine that moves with clockwork precision and which he refers to with so much respect every now and then in this chronicle of his. So many attributes of Pran Kishore's versatile personality shine through his achievements as he records the huge number of years spent in Radio Kashmir, in a clinical and at the same time human manner.

Fortunate to have been engaged from the very beginning in a profession that 'courses through his veins like blood' Pran Kishore is able to segue the very core of his being with that passion that is so essential to make a human being love his vocation even more than his own life. There are incidents recorded that might have led to tragedy. Fortune has however been kind and made it possible for us to glean as our own learning experiences, a number of events from life listed in this book. The fact that this book is a record of the establishment, growth and success of Radio Kashmir is only incidental, it is actually a record of life itself, a record that dexterously depicts events in all their dimensions and encompasses an enormous range of emotions.

Vinay Sethi

PROLOGUE

Broadcasting in the state of Jammu & Kashmir started first in Jammu through a 1 KW medium transmitter installed in the building of Ranbir Singh High School, where a studio was established in one of the its classrooms and the engineering control room was in another room. This station was inaugurated on the first day of November 1947 by Maharaja Hari Singh and was attended by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah who had taken over as The Chief Administrator of Jammu & Kashmir State and other dignitaries. It was started with the technical and software assistance from All India Radio, Delhi. Rajinder Singh Bedi, the famous Urdu writer was appointed as Station Director with H. S. Bedi from Jalandhar as a Programme Officer to look after the functioning of the station. Besides them K.R. Gupta from Jammu was appointed Assistant Engineer and Krishna Bhasin was as an announcer. With that small staff and a few casual artists foundation of Radio Kashmir was laid in Jammu. To augment this skeleton staff Mirza Ghulam Hassan Beg Arif, Mir Ghulam Rasool Nazli, Abdulhaq Burq Somnath Kachroo and Mahider Kaul were selected in Srinagar and sent to Jammu. They were later on transferred to Srinagar when the dream of a radio station in Srinagar too was taking shape.

I remember, before that Prabhat Mukerjee, Station Director All India Radio Lukhnow then, had landed in Srinagar with a couple of engineers and an old heavy built Presto recorder to record Kashmiri folk songs and audition some voices for the radio station which was going to come up soon. Tall and handsome, Prabhat Mukerjee came to the Exhibition Grounds, where we had

established the head office of the National Culture Front (the organization of artists, writers and theatre workers dedicated to bring a cultural renaissance in Kashmir) in search of talent. He selected Mohanlal Aima and a folk artists group for recording in the makeshift recording room. He established the studio in the main polo pavilion in Pologround, next to the pavilion where Radio Kashmir, Srinagar was later on housed...Prabhat Mukerjee's stay was not long as he was cast by the famous film director P.C.Barua as the hero in his film against his wife Jamuna Devi a star of Bengali films. So he resigned from All India Radio and moved to films and afterwards he himself became a producer and director. As was destined we came together after nearly two decades to direct the film ' Mahjoor'. Some of the recordings he had done in 1948 were broadcast later on from Delh.

Meanwhile blueprint for a regular radio station in Srinagar had been finalized and a veteran broadcaster Ayaaz Ansari had been deputed by the I&B Ministry, Government of India in November 1947 to organize things, He was followed by a regular team of programme officers comprising A.L.Maini, Ranbir Vohra, K.P.Shangloo and engineer B.R.Kapoor led by K.S. Mallik. In fact they were the crusaders who worked day and night from November 1947, when they landed in Srinagar, till first July, 1948 when Radio Kashmir was finally launched. Of course they were assisted by the local staff transferred from Jammu and selected from Kashmir. It was because of them that the organization started as a professional institution. So I dedicate this work to the efforts they made to train us.



PREFACE

Mere mention of Radio Kashmir takes me down memory lane. The Time Machine rewinds and I travel past dozens of luminaries who blazed a trail in broadcasting in Kashmir. The journey begins in 1948, when, as a young man in my early twenties I had joined this great organization where I spent nearly thirty-five years of my life in creativity. It was this organization that groomed my talent and I feel proud of having been an integral part of it like the multitudes of writers, dramatists, actors, musicians, singers, journalists, newsreaders and others who made Radio Kashmir what it is today. With the passage of time, it became a unique cultural institution, an integral part of every Kashmiri's daily life. It was because of its inclusive as well as exclusive approach to the fast changing socio-economic and political scenario that it withstood the ravages of time and became not only an entertainer but also a disseminator of world awareness and rational thought that had been the true spirit of Kashmir.

When we started broadcasting in Kashmir it was an era of live broadcasting, tedious, but satisfying. It had the feel, that here were we, broadcasting from the studios and there people in their homes, community centres, shops and road crossings, simultaneously listening, reacting and commenting on our broadcasts, just like the spontaneous response of live audiences during theatrical performances. Besides, the feeling that we were creating history was substantial and at the same time the fan-following generated, made us popular even individually.

There was no source of information or entertainment other than

radio due to the partition of the country and the devastation created by the invasion of the hordes of tribesmen sent by Pakistan. Besides indiscriminate killing and looting and arson, they had burnt down the only source of electricity in Kashmir, the *Mahura* powerhouse. With no cinema hall operating, no newspapers from other parts of the country reaching Srinagar, Radio Kashmir Srinagar became the only source of information and communication with the rest of the world. At the same time, it became an extremely effective cultural institution that provided a solid platform for talent to be projected, of which there was no dearth in Kashmir.

When I look back, I wonder wherefrom had we gathered the energy that made us accept challenges and do experiments with the limited technical resources at our disposal while helping each other in creativity and making our projects work. We were not always successful; we did fail at times, but give up? Never! We never gave up. We were keen to carry to our listeners every activity that was happening in the valley in one form or the other. Take, for instance, covering an event through a running commentary which is child's play now. It was like a running commentary not on a public function, which usually is held in a hall or at a specific place, but on events which kept on shifting from one location to another. There were no OB vans those days, nor was there any outdoor-recording facility. The only connectivity to our studios was through antiquated telephone lines. In spite of these handicaps, we did do a commendable job.

During those days we had become a closely knit family caring for each other, sharing each other's problems and trying to solve them. We enjoyed every moment of our creativity. As most of the programmes used to be live, we would work hard till the late hours in the nights to make each other's programme a success. This joint effort made Radio Kashmir not only a government publicity organ but a real centre of culture, which attracted the best of writers, poets, musicians, actors and composers not only from the state of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, but also from other different parts of the country. We kept on scouting for talent and then grooming

and encouraging an infinite number of young men and women who later on, carrying the legacy forward, created a name for themselves.

While recalling these memories, the remarkable colleagues, with whom I had the honour of working and who blazed a trail in broadcasting in Kashmir, come to my mind. I was yearning all these years to pay my humble homage to all of them. Because of my extremely busy life in the world of film and television, I was earlier unable to get the time to fulfill this obligation. As the sands of time are now fast running out, I felt I must keep all my other assignments aside and sit down to compile and write these memories that are now a very pleasant part of my life. And that is exactly what I am presently doing.

In spite of having moved over to a wider field of films and television I always remained a broadcaster in my heart of hearts. I do confess that whatever little I have attained in my creativity, whatever little recognition I have got, on the national scene or abroad, is all due to those long years of the grooming I got in broadcasting in Kashmir, and also my years in the theatre in Kashmir. Even, the experience of film-making that I'd gained was again due to the patronage of this organization as it never held me back whenever I would get involved in other fields too. I still feel that I belong to Radio Kashmir as the opening announcement of *Vadi Ki Awaaz* that was recorded in my voice in the year 1965 during the war with Pakistan, although worn out, is still an important part of its daily broadcasts. Besides that, the repeat broadcast of the plays produced by me which I had also acted in, are still well preserved there in its archives. It gives me immense pleasure when I tune in to Radio Kashmir Srinagar, whenever in Mumbai or here in Pune, to find the younger generation carrying the great legacy forward.

These memories are divided into three parts:-

The first part pertains to the persons who worked tirelessly, day in and day out to project the cultural and spiritual ethos, the essence of *Kashmiriat*, through the medium of sound. It was because of this inner strength that Kashmir was able to emerge victorious even

in the toughest of times and tests.

The second segment pertains to the long chain of radio documentaries I produced after our team travelled extensively in the extreme border areas of our state, from Thako Chak to Poonch in the Jammu sector covering Akhnoor, Nav Shehra, Jhangadh, Chingas, Rajouri, Thana Mandi and Bafliaz. And then in the North of Kashmir covering the areas of Dawar Gurez, Tilel and Koshur Tilel, right up to the twin villages of Abdullan and Gujran on one flank and Navgam, Lipa Valley Tchoonthwol, Ringpain and Ringbala on the other, through Ghumri, Drass, Kargil, Basgo, Shanko valley in the Kargil sector, followed by Dah, Hanu and Gurgurdoo in the Batalic sector. The travel went on to Leh, Matho, Stagna, Shakti, Darbuk, Cheshul, Loma Sands, Karo, and then ultimately to Pooga Valley in the Ladakh sector

The third part records the socio-political changes that had taken place during my thirty-five years in broadcasting which I have not only been an eyewitness to. but also directly or indirectly part of. These are very important events of which many historians may be unaware. These events have at one stage or the other changed the history of Kashmir. These events have even thrown up many nonentities to whom our destiny was handed over and that too on a platter. This part of the book is not black or grey but also white, and the other colours of light too. These too are bound to become an important part of it when our history will get written in the future.

I always feel like a son returning home after a long time when I enter the studios, whenever I find time from my busy schedule and am in Srinagar. I always have a lump in my throat when I pass through the corridors of the studios and see the gallery of photographs of my colleagues and friends, who are no more. I do not know how heartbroken I shall feel now, and, when God willing, I shall visit the studios again. When, in the spring of 2012, I did, my wife Shanta Kaul was with me, and we had recorded a long interview together. Now she won't be there and I shall walk alone through its corridors. She probably had a bigger fan-following than

me. That was why the children for whom she was the lovable *Aapaajaan* kept in contact with her even when they grew up. I am highly indebted to her fans, the cultural organizations and large number of newspapers that offered condolences when she left her mortal frame and merged with the Supreme Spirit. Well, that is life and it goes on. And so shall Radio Kashmir.

Historians wrote histories of kings and queens in the olden times and of their replicas, the political elite, in the near past. Some dedicated to the muse, do talk and write about great masters of the refined arts. They, however, ignored the multitude of artists who have been contributing to society silently all through their life, not for great honours and recognition, but because they had the fire of passion in them. It is because of them that the river flows on, fertilizing the fields of creativity. Even the best of them remain nameless and forgotten. It was this pain that urged me to pay humble homage to those remarkable human beings who had become part of my own entity in my long association with broadcasting. It was through them that I learnt a lot because of which I have achieved the little that people think is valuable.

My homage to Radio Kashmir Srinagar and to its artists, writers, musicians, technicians and the political elite is not to add to my literary pursuits or to add to my publications. It is a simple narrative written from the very depths of my heart and I am sure it shall be evaluated as that.

These memories would have been lost but for the preservation of my notes and diaries by my wife, Shanta Kaul, a co-traveler in broadcasting, and after her demise by Neerja and Sanjala, my daughters, and Kalpana and Anita, my daughters-in-law who helped sort them out chronologically. I am grateful to my sons Ajay and Rahul for selecting relevant photographs from a large number of old albums, editing and scanning them for inclusion in the book.

I express my gratitude to the renowned author and critic Prof. Shafi Shauq for his valuable suggestions after going through the first draft of the book.

I thank Chinar Publications, Pune and Shri Sanjay Nahar in

particular for their co-operation in giving the book the finish it deserved.

And finally, my sincere thanks to Shri Vinay M. Sethi, author of *How Not to Speak English* who was gracious enough to edit my book.


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PART 1

Radio Kashmir is not just the name of a government department of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India - it is rather the name of an institution, a dynamic centre of culture, which, everyone who has been associated with it, either as a member of its staff or a contributor to its programmes, always feels proud of. So, when I recollect the thirty- five years I spent there, participating in all the branches of broadcasting, I am reliving those remarkable days. While doing so, a picture suddenly erupts in my mind. I see in my mind the masters of *Sufiana moosiqi* leisurely sitting under the cool shade of the young *chinars* that had been planted decades ago in the lawns of the Polo Ground of the erstwhile Maharaja Hari Singh. It was one of his polo pavilions that had become a home for Radio Kashmir Srinagar in which its studios were built. And it was from there that broadcasting in Kashmir had started on the first day of July 1948. Coming back to the scene under the chinar and the *sufiana* masters, I can see it all in my mind's eye.

I see them smoking their hookah and talking of bygone days and the changing times. This was their usual past-time while they tuned their musical instruments. Since at that time broadcasting was divided into three transmissions, Morning, Day and Evening,- there used to be a gap of a few hours in between these transmissions. We too would sometimes join them and listen to their experiences that enriched and enlightened us.



GREAT MASTERS OF SUFIANA MUSIC

At the advent, a group of *Sufiana* artists, comprising, Ustad Sidda Joo, his brother Ustad Ramzan Joo, Ustad Amir Joo, Ustad Mohammad Abdulla Tibet Baqal, Ustad Ghulam Mohammad Qalinbaft, Ghulam Qadir Mujavir, Mohammad Sultan Mir and Peer Nizamuddin, (the famous stock character Niza Saib of the Rural Programme) was formed by Radio Kashmir Srinagar. Ustad Sidda Joo was a more knowledgeable master of *Sufiana Moosiqi* than his brother Ramzan Joo, as was admitted by all his contemporaries. We regretted that we had been deprived of gaining some more nuances of this great classical style of music, from him, than we had. After his death, the most senior maestro left was Ustad Ramzan Joo. He was a very serious type of a person. So we had a limited exchange of views with him. Besides, not being on the staff, we did not get the opportunity of sitting with him at a stretch, except the time when we recorded a long interview with him for our archives. That was a rare opportunity, where he opened up and talked at length about his youth and the days of his being groomed into this intricate system of music. This interview was a great source of information not only of the music scene of the late eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, but also of the socio-economic conditions of the people of that era. He remained quite reserved in the beginning of the interview but gradually opened up and we were amazed to see how articulate he could be when he chose to. We had read about and heard of *Hafiz Nagma* and, therefore, had a vague idea of what it must have been like. He had been a part of the *mehfils* of *Hafiz Nagma*. He wailed that this

refined art had got degenerated by the rich offshoots of those very nobles, who had once patronized it. He, in that interview, (which I hope is still there in the valuable archives of Radio Kashmir Srinagar), narrated how the *Hafizas*, the singing and the dancing girls, were selected and then trained in the intricacies of this art form. They were not only made to memorize the lyrics of the different *maqams* (ragas) but were also made aware of their substance and meaning, so that they could interpret and present the essence of the songs, which were the soul of the *maqams*, properly through the flow of their dance movements. He had then talked about the training these *Hafizas* got, how their costumes, their ornaments, even their head gear was designed. He even talked of some of the very talented well known *Hafizas*. It was due to the tact of Ali Mohammad Lone, who was interviewing him that he extracted all this information, in spite of Ramzan Joo trying to evade questions about the morality that was connected with these *mehfils* like the *mujraas* of the *Nawabs* of Awadh. He, however, cursed those upstarts who had brought such a bad name to this art, which was meant to raise our spiritual level. He felt that we mortals had sunk to such low depths, that the Maharaja's government was forced to ban all *Hafiz naghma mehfils* in the beginning of the 20th century.

There was a change in the lifestyle of the people after 1947 including the dresses they wore and the head gear they put on. Fur caps had replaced turbans, coats and pants had already replaced *phirans* and *shalwars*. But Ustad Ramzan Joo never gave up on his *phiran* and his turban. His big turban always reminded me of the huge turban of Maharaja Pratap Singh who, being short statured used to put on a very big turban and get it tied upwards so that he would look taller. Ustad Ramzan Joo was not short of height. His turban was precarious because it looked huge in comparison to his face that was very small in spite of the scanty beard that it adorned. Whether he was booked for a broadcast or not, he would invariably drop in at the studios, on his return from *Syed Sahib's Dargah* in Gupkar Road, where he paid obeisance every Thursday. This routine

of his was to meet his *sufiana* friends and have a chat with them over a few puffs of the hookah. It was from him that we learnt that we had *gharanas in sufiana moosiqui* too as we had in Indian classical music. And those artists, who picked up this art as amateurs were called *shudurs* and, as he believed, could not attain that perfection which the off-shoots of the masters of the *gharanas* could. Though he did not talk about it in the presence of either Ghulam Mohamad Qalinbaft or Mohammad Abdullah Tibatbaqal, who, in spite of not belonging to any family of traditional musicians, had attained not only great stature in the art, but also had also developed immense popularity amongst the listeners. Both of them had even got the coveted Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, the highest national award for music in India.

Had it not been for the patronage of Radio Kashmir and its efforts to promote this art form through its programmes, this refined and valuable heritage of Kashmir would have got lost. As a programmer, I give full credit to both these stalwarts who infused new life into this dying art. Ustad Mohammad Abdullah Tibetbaqal by profession was a *puivone*, a trader who traded in *pashmina* wool and Kashmiri tea, called *Bombay Chai* those days. He had travelled to Ladakh in his youth to procure *pashmina* wool, but had been mesmerized by the masters of *Sufiana moosiqui* would sit for long hours listening to them. That was how he got initiated into this style of music. God had given him a melodious voice and that was why his masters encouraged him and took him under their tutelage. He introduced the melody of different *maqams* of *sufiana moosiqui* even in our light music programmes, especially the songs with devotional and mystic content. Who can forget the immortal *Leela* (Kashmiri bhajans) of Krishan Joo Razdan, '*Bel Tai Madal Vena Golab Pamposhi Dastai*' that he composed and sang? This *Leela* is being played back even now during the festival of *Herath*, the Kashmiri *Shiv Ratri*. He also guided the composer Mohanlal Aima when he recorded the famous Naati Shareef '*Ya Nabi gosh faryadan thav ya Nabi gosh faryadan thav*' of Abdul Ahad Nadim. Mohan Lal Aima sought his guidance even in composing Mehjoor's song

‘*Tammana Chani Deedaruk Me Chum Yambezaley Bomburo*’, in *Maqami Rasti Kashmiri* for the Hafiza sequence of the bilingual feature film *Shair-Kashmir Mehjoor* which I was co-directing with Prabhat Mukerji. That was Mohammad Adullah Tibetbaqal who had a modern outlook and helped in infusing new life into this dying art. While singing he would himself play the santoor. He had a command over this instrument and quite a few times accompanied popular light music compositions too.

Ustad Ghulam Mohammad Qalinbaft was a master weaver of carpets before he got drawn to *sufiana moosiqui* just like Mohammad Abdullah Tibetbaqal. When Radio Kashmir started operating in Srinagar he too was appointed as a staff artist. He too was a master of the *santoor* but preferred to have the Kashmiri sitar as his accompaniment. It goes to his credit that he helped to save this form of music from getting lost to oblivion. He started teaching the younger generation of singers first in the Govt. College for Women, with the permission of the authorities of Radio Kashmir Srinagar. And then after his retirement, he began teaching this art to the younger generation of singers in the music classes of Jammu & Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, with the result that quite a few artists of the younger generation became conscious of the beauty of the melodies of different *maqams*. This movement gave birth to some very popular songs like ‘*Yas Maramatis Mainz Chi Naman Kaman Saeti Gome*’ and ‘*Yariman Beniyaz*’ etc. which became quite popular and are even now part of modern day music concerts. It goes to the credit of Radio Kashmir that this almost dying art got a new life that gave birth to a new generation of musicians who have taken it up as a profession. They have carried it not only to the different parts of their own country, but also to quite a few countries beyond the shores of India like the USA, Central Asia, Hong Kong, Japan etc.

Coming back to those old masters, their company made us conscious of the fact that the contents of the lyrics used in different *maqams* were as important as the notes of the melody. Only a very experienced master could select these lyrics from the great Persian

and Kashmiri poetry collections. The pearls of their words when threaded into the notations of the *maqams*, created an effective and spontaneous flow to the rhythm as well as the sweetness to the melody. So much so that a *maqam* was recognized by the lyrics contained within it.

It seems that there must first have been only those *maqams* prevalent and in vogue which the masters from Central Asia and Iran had brought with them during the reign of Sultan Zainul Abidin Badshah, like *Maqami Nau Rozi Sabah*, *Maqami Iraq*, *Maqami Isfahan*, *Maqami Rasti Farsi* etc. That is why the lyrics in them are predominantly Persian. Since Badshah held regular *mehfils* of music in which musicians from different parts of the country would also be invited to participate, there must have been interaction and inter- influences. With the result that our artists were tempted to introduce new *maqams* and gave them the names of Indian ragas like *Maqami Asawari*, *Maqam- e - Bhairvi*, *Maqam -e - Sohni*, *Maqam-e-Jhinjoti* etc. We tried hard to find a similarity between these *maqams* and the corresponding Indian ragas, but failed to find any, except their names.

As the hours of broadcasting kept on increasing, the need to discover more talent also grew. Like in other branches of broadcasting, the area for scouting talent got extended to our villages too. That is how Ustad Kamal Butt from Wahthore village along with his party and Ustad Khaliq Butt of village of Bijbihada, were discovered; both had their individual styles of presenting *sufiana kalam*, markedly different from those of both Tibetbaqal and Qalinbaft. Their style blended more with the folk texture than the classical. But all the same, their singing was extremely melodious. Both used the *Sehtar* (the diminutive version of the Indian sitar) for instrumental support while singing, in which Kamal Butt was a master. Both of them were accompanied prominently by their sons. In fact Abdul Khaliq's son Mohammad Abdullah came to be known as Mohammad Abdullah *Sehtari* and was later on appointed as a staff artist by Radio Kashmir. Kamal Butt had been a boy dancer, (*Bacha Kot*), and was the soul of the *Bhanda*

Paethers, (the folk theatre-) of *Wahthore* when he was a teenager. He was much sought after, being a very good singer with a handsome face and personality. He however gave up dancing after his marriage and dedicated his life to *Sufiana moosiqi*.

Ustad Mohammad Abdullah Tibetbaqal, till his last days in Radio Kashmir used the santoor in a masterly way as his accompaniment and did not hesitate in accompanying the light music compositions too as an instrumentalist, while Qalinbaft hesitated in doing so. Though the santoor was the basic instrument they used as an accompaniment with their singing, they both played on the *Sehtar* too with equal ease. As already mentioned, both of them were awarded the Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards. Tibetbaqal, when Mohanlal Aima was a member of the General Council of this august national institution and Qalinbaft, when I became its member and projected his talent and contribution to Kashmiri classical music effectively to the General Council of the Academy.

While writing on those doyens of music, they emerge on the screen of my memory, ever smiling, ever joking, barring Ustad Amir Joo the best *saaz nawaz* that Kashmir has produced. Nobody dared to cut a joke with him. Not that he would get angry, but they revered him, being their elder and very knowledgeable. That was why his simple instrument of one thick string of a goat's dried gut and a few supplementary strings of brass and steel created mesmerizing magic when he glided the bow bent by a loose string of horse tail hair, over them.

While speaking of Amir Shah, I can never forget a particular morning. The morning transmission had closed down. Lights in the studios too had been switched off. I was in my room on the ground floor, when I suddenly remembered that I had left the tapes that had to be sent to Delhi, in the Effects Room. I rushed up the stairs and entered the studios. It was dark inside. I was about to switch the light on, when I heard a melodious sound coming from the other side of the corridor. First I got scared, but walked slowly towards the sound in the dim light of the corridor and reached the music studio. I could now decipher that it was the sound of *Saz-e-*

Kashmir. I slowly entered the recording booth and tried to peep through the observation window. I was surprised to make out in the very dim light coming from the corridor, that it was Amir Shah busy in his *rhyaz* or in playing for himself, for his own pleasure on his instrument. That was Ustad Amir Shah. I did not dare switch the lights on. It was a unique experience. I waited till he heaved a deep sigh and put the instrument back into its stand, after which, exhaling '*Allah hoo*' he quietly walked out of the studio. I did not think it proper to disturb him and did not leave the booth till he was no more in sight. Such were the people who blazed a trail in Radio Kashmir Srinagar.

Before going ahead with my narrative, I must record here that every profession in Kashmir, whether wood carving, carpet weaving, shawl embroidering or professional cooking has its own terminology. So did the Sufiana musicians. They called the santoor - *shup* (Winnower), the Sehtar - *choncha* (a big wooden spoon used by professional cooks), the tabla, *duqura* (two rounds) and so on and so forth.

While speaking of Sufiana music, which, we have been told by the historians, was earlier called *sazandar moosiqui*, I am reminded of a couple of other incidents. We were delighted to know that the head of the Music Faculty of Tehran University Doctor Roohullah Khaliqi would be visiting our studios to have an exchange of ideas with our Sufiana artists. So Qaiser Qalander, who was in charge of the music section then, invited Maulana Shamsudin Hairat Kamili and Syed Mubarak Shah Fitrat, well known Persian scholars who were also connoisseurs of *sufiana moosiqui*, to facilitate a dialogue between our artists and Dr. Khaliqi and to give him a brief of the history of the development of this art form in Kashmir, which is believed to have originally travelled from his country, Iran. This meeting was held in the small hall adjacent to our library on the first floor of our Polo ground studios, which was used for such occasions. We sat around them and were listening to the discussion with rapt attention. Qaiser Qalander occasionally joined the discussion. Dr. Khaliqi was trying to find out some similarity

between our presentations of the *maqams* whose names we had retained, like *Maqami Nav Rozi Saba*, *Maqam-i- Iraq* etc and the present day Iranian rendering of the same *maqams*. I recollect, both Tibetbaqal and Qalinbaft jointly sang *Maqam-i- Nav Rozi Saba* on this occasion. Dr. Khaliqi got lost and confused. He took the *sehtar* from Qalinbaft and played the same *maqam* and sang it too. Winding up, he said, "That is *Nav Roz-i- Saba* as it is sung in present day Iran." There was no similarity between the two. Hairat Kamili as well as Maulana Fitrat was perplexed. They argued and tried to establish that our *Nav Roz-i- Saba* was the real *maqam*. As the discussion started heating up, Qaiser Qalander saved the day by explaining to both our scholars that it might have been that we retained the original form, while Iran had moved ahead with time. That pacified our experts.

It is rather odd to say that it did satisfy only their ego. But the fact remains that we have held this tradition as a sacred cow over the past many centuries and never tried to develop it. Therefore it is heartening to see the younger generation of musicians, especially from families of traditional masters, experimenting both with form and content. New poetry, new rhythm patterns, even modern instruments are judiciously used. That is what Iran and Central Asian countries have done. We have seen it in The 12th Festival of Asian Arts held in Hong Kong in 1989 where I was leading a delegation of Indian artists comprising artists, mostly from Kashmir, representing India. Artists from thirteen countries were participating in that festival including a big group from Chinese Sinkiang. We were fascinated to see that they were using almost all the instruments that we use in our *Sufiana moosiqui like the santoor*, rather broader than ours, two or may be more, the bow instruments, *saaz-e Kashmir*, three *sehtars*, besides modern western instruments like the violin, mandolin and an assortment of percussion instruments. They presented orchestral items and varied songs with both slow and fast rhythms that suited the different dance numbers that their bevy of graceful dancers presented. The melodies at many stages resembled the strains of our own music. It was not only I,

but also Krishan Langoo, who was directing the music of our programme, and Ustad Ali Mohammad Sheikh, the star attraction of our contingent, who marked it. Both of them had visited Tashkent as members of the Jammu & Kashmir Academy's cultural delegation earlier and had marked how their classical music, akin to our own, had developed beyond our imagination. They had even modified their traditional musical instruments to get acquainted with the sophistication of Western instruments. excuse me for digressing but these facts will be of some help to researchers in the future.

The second enlightening experience that comes to my mind, is quite educating and it made me conscious of the strength of my mother tongue, Kashmiri. Since it is related to another artist of *Sufiana Kalam*, a master in his own right, Late Abdul Khaliq Butt of Bijbihada, I take the liberty of plugging it in here. We had started recording memories of our very senior artists for our archives. Most of the recordings were done in our studios. But since Abdul Khaliq Butt was bed-ridden and as such could not come to the studios, I decided to record him at his home in Bijbihara village.

He was in his bed and very weak. His son, Mohammad Abdullah was by his side who supported him and made him sit, resting him against the pillows. After settling down, he asked his son to give him his turban. The neatly tied turban was placed on a small shelf on the wall. I told him not to worry about the turban as the interview was not for television but for radio. He smiled and looked at me with a glint in his eyes and said, "We are talking about *Sufiana Kalam*, Pran Sahib, and a *saazander* (musician) is incomplete without a *dastaar* (turban). Look at my son, this Mohammad Abdullah - he is shy of putting on a *dastaar* - that is why he is not taken seriously." Saying this, he gave a big laugh and took the turban from his son and then looked at me and said, "*Bismillah!* Let us start now. Please keep in mind that I am an uneducated villager, so please do not ask me any difficult question." I assured him that I had come to simply chat with him. He smiled with a mischievous look and then started talking about his life in music. I

was amazed at his elocution and the flow of the Kashmiri Language in its purity, decked with beautiful words, phrases, similes, and metaphors. When he started talking about his childhood, he heaved a deep sigh and then talked of the abject poverty of the people especially in the villages then. "They toiled generation after generation in the fields that did not belong to them, and produced heaps and heaps of grain, to feed the city and were themselves left starving. It was the time of bonded labour - a life of drudgery worse than slavery." He then talked about his first journey of life, to the city of Srinagar. There was no road. One had to walk through the thickets of *krishim* grass with saw-like teeth on the long blades that would inflict cuts and bruises on one's legs while travelling through them. This grass covered even the narrowest pony tracks throughout the journey. I vividly remember the preparations that were made quite a few days ahead of the journey. "The first operation was the collection of *kilam*, the resin-mixed sap of the conifers, to cover our legs to save them from sharp scratches of the *krishim* grass and insects. And then, old strips of cloth were procured to be used as puttees around our legs for further protection and for strengthening and supporting our leg muscles."

Though it may all sound as an extract from some folk tale, the days were like that then. It was the genius of his narration and the first hand experience of a veteran artist that made me instruct the recording engineer, Moti Lal Kaul to keep on recording whatever he narrated. Abdul Khaliq then narrated how that adventurous journey had been executed. "We started from here early in the morning. It was the peak of summer. We gave a break to our journey after two or three miles, as my legs had started aching." Abdul Khaliq continued, "We saw a mighty *Chinar* slightly off the dusty track, and went there to cool off our sweat. I was intrigued to see an old man with a flowing beard, wearing a *phiran* with quite a few multi-colour patches sewed on it, with a peasant's skull-cap on his head, sitting under the *Chinar*. There was a tin-coated copper hookah by his side. Seeing my father and the couple of his friends approaching, he quickly moved the *kangri*, the earthen fire-pot to

his side, pulled the hookah close, took off the *chillum* from it while greeting us with the usual *Assalam Alaikum*. He quickly loaded the *chillum* with fresh tobacco and topped it with burning cinders. Keeping the hookah ready, he spread the old blanket lying nearby and with deep respect invited us to sit and relax. Complaining of the hot weather he offered my father the hookah and told the others to stretch their legs. They, instead, pushed me forward and told him to massage and soften my legs first. You can imagine how scared I must have been. I protested but after a lot of persuasion agreed to stretch my legs. Then he started pressing and rubbing my legs. After his massage all my fatigue was gone. He patted my head and said 'did you see my magic?' A child's fancy, I really thought he was a magician. He then massaged everyone's legs. They paid him a few coins, must have been a few dimes. So, relaxed, the party left for the onward journey after puffing off all the tobacco in the *chillum*. I later on came to know that these masseurs were called '*Mothi Shah*' (massage-king) who would be there at every stage of the journey.

Abdul Khaliq told us how long and arduous the journey was those days from Bijbihara to Srinagar which now seems to be at a stone's throw. He then gave a vivid description of how the Banihal road which was then called *Banahaej Tanga wath* (Banihall Cart road) was built, and how every headman of every village on the route was asked to make available labour on *begaar* (labour without payment) to dig and level the stretch of the *kaccha road* that passed through their village. He had during his adolescence, seen how a large number of youth were sent on forced labour to the northern borders of the state, through treacherous terrains, carrying huge loads of rations for the Maharaja's army, from where many of them would not return. Khaliq Joo's narrative was so flowing that even the most eloquent orator would have been left speechless. More than that, the Kashmiri language was so chaste that I had got it preserved for our archives, not only for its historical value, but also to illustrate what a wide spectrum our language had and to rebut those who kept on arguing that the Kashmiri language

could not be used for expressive and refined prose. I must mention here that Khaliq Butt was not formally educated. His speech was so natural and his diction so perfect that he did not fumble even once for a word, and seldom used an alien word to express himself.

This deviation from my narrative of my days in broadcasting should be excused, but it did depict how gifted those old masters of ours were. Well, I was talking about our great *Ustads* of our classical music *Sufiana kalam*. Another stalwart was Kamal Butt. This tall rather lanky musician came from *Wahthore* the village of the famous *Bhands*, talented actors of our folk theatre the *Bhand Paether*. His style of singing was markedly different from both Tibetbaqal and Qalinbaft. He too had a rustic flavour like Khaliq Butt but was more knowledgeable than Khaliq Butt. He had a melodious voice. His rendering of *Shurkhs* of Nunda *Rishi* (Sheikh Noor-u-Din Noorani) and *Vakhs* of *Lalded* (Laleshwari) was his specialty.

The role of Radio Kashmir Srinagar in promoting the younger generation of musicians who picked up this art, and appeared on the scene during my tenure in the organization, also needs special mention. The sons of the maestros, who were initiated into this field by their fathers, adopted this profession as they were sure to get a job at the radio station which could sustain them materially. Son of Ustad Ramzan Joo, Ghulam Mohammad Saz Nawaz was the best amongst them whose shorter compositions with lyrics of the nineteenth-century poets became quite popular. He too was honoured by the *Sangeet Natak Akademi* for his contribution to this art. Those young men, who were fascinated and drawn to it, became real path breakers. These formally educated young men, once initiated, tried to do experiments and explored the possibility of having a system of notation, so that orchestration could be developed. Without a scientific notation any genre of music could not be developed.

First and foremost among these pioneers was Sheikh Abdul Aziz, who was initiated into this form of Kashmiri music by Ustad Qalinbaft. A state government employee and an amateur in the

beginning, Abdul Aziz quit his government job in the fire brigade and joined Radio Kashmir as a staff artist. By remaining in the company of other musicians, Abdul Aziz immersed himself so deep into the aesthetics of *Sufiana moosiqi* that it became a passion for him. As there was no notation available, those who wanted to learn this art had to listen to their teachers and after a considerable time accompany them and thus gradually pick up the art of singing different *maqams*. It was this limitation that provoked Sheikh Abdul Aziz to seek the guidance of those masters who were trained in Indian Classical music to help him. There could have been no better person than Pundit Shambhu Nath Sopori, the well known sitar player, who had been performing and teaching the younger generations for decades and was well acquainted with *Sufiana moosiqi* too. Sheikh Abdul Aziz sought his guidance, and got his cooperation. Thus the duo worked hard for years and deciphered the notes and rhythm patterns prevalent and compiled them in the form of a treatise, which was published by the State Cultural Academy. This work, later on, inspired some music researchers from other countries too who got in touch with Sheikh Abdul Aziz and Pundit Shambhu Nath Sopori to carry forward their research.

It will not be out of place here to mention that this would not have been possible if the venerable promoter of Kashmiri literature Noor Mohammad and his publishing house, Noor Mohammad & Sons did not have the foresight, many decades earlier, of collecting and publishing volumes of the songs and other details of almost all the *maqams* and *tillanas* (Tarana in Hindustani music) sung by maestros then. Making this as the basis, both Sheikh Abdul Aziz and Sopori Sahib worked hard on this project. It is however doubtful whether this helped the younger generation of musicians or not, but it will certainly help those who are interested in research.

Another dedicated person, although not a regular performer, was Noor Mohammad Butt. He too was interested in tracing the history of this art form. A student of another pioneer in propagating Indian classical music in Kashmir, Shri Jagar Nath Shivpuri, Noor Mohammad Butt himself played the santoor. That must have drawn

him towards some masters of *Sufiana moosiqi*. Being a well read person, he too developed academic interest in this subject and worked on his project for quite a few years. Later on, he published his treatise in the form of a booklet, which at best can be called a supplement to the book mentioned. Qaiser Qalander too had a lot of interest in promoting this art and contributed to some music journals published by Tehran University and to various academic publications. He thereby tried to explore the similarity between the music of Iran and that of Kashmir. He wrote a book on his research. I am sure that there will be a time when some young musicians will work on a project of transforming the *Maqams* into western notations. It will not only help preserve this dying art, but also make it the foundation for modernization. It may not be out of context to mention the revived interest of some of our scholars too in this subject. A few years ago, even our great scholar, poet and author Mohammad Amin Kamil, on the initiative of the J & K Academy, wrote a valuable and informative book on this subject. As there was no ancient scientific record available, the work done by these lovers of music, howsoever debatable, is invaluable. Well, that was about *Sufiana moosiqi* and Radio Kashmir's contribution in infusing a new life into this dying art during my days in broadcasting.



ROLE OF RADIO IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF FOLK AND LIGHT MUSIC

It was our folk music that **lived and thrived** and also sustained us, through the **vagaries** of time that Kashmir has passed through. It had remained **part and parcel** of people's life, in their happiness, their agony, their **drudgery**, their dreams and their aspirations. Like the folk music of other regions of the country, our folk music took birth in its soil. It got melody from the whispers of the deodars, singing of the birds, **fragrance of the blossoms**, **scents of jasmine flowers** and **the aroma of the paddy fields**. It got its rhythm from the **murmur** of the **running** brooks and the **swaying of trees**. The breaking of the waterfalls rushing down mountains **infused vigor** into its rhythms and the **soothing lilt** from the **pedaling** of boatmen. They sang while **tilling** our fields, **sowing seeds**, weeding out **redundant** grass, and then **harvesting** the crop. They even sang while pulling heavily loaded carts, pushing huge **barges** against currents, or ferrying people across lakes. They **poured** out their hearts at temples and shrines of the **dervishes** to seek their blessings, and then, of course, at their **marriage-ceremonies**. So these songs naturally became an integral part of the broadcasts of Radio Kashmir from its very inception.

To **feed** long hours of broadcasting we needed a large repertory of folk-singers. Kashmir in the forties was very conservative. Even the men, who were taking up singing as a profession, were looked down upon. Encouraging and motivating women to come to broadcast from the radio station was unimaginable. **In spite of the** fact that at that time artists were not expected to go through the

mill of tough auditions, they ~~shied~~ away. But there was no dearth of male singers especially of, *chhakri* singers. From amongst the educated class of so called respectable families was Mohanlal Aima, who took up this form of music to entertain people in spite of the fact that he had a Master's in law. With a melodious voice he had a God given sense of rhythm. Though he had no regular training in music, he made a name and future in singing and became a very good composer and gave some memorable tunes to Kashmiri light music. As far as I remember, he presented the first *Chakri* programme over Radio Kashmir Srinagar. His singing had become quite popular even before he joined Radio Kashmir and that had earned him the nickname *Mohana Chhakeir* which he joyously accepted. So, credit must go to him motivating talented and educated youngsters to become singers of the future.

I had seen Mohanlal Aima in 1942, in the first production of Imtiyaz Ali Taj's famous Urdu play *Anarkali* staged by the S. P. College Dramatic Club. This very play later on became the basis and motivation for K Aasif to produce the remarkable film *Mughl-e-Azam*. Aima played the bosom friend of *Shahzada* Salim in this stage play. With a beautiful personality, Aima looked more graceful than Prince Salim himself. The play was directed by Dr. Mohammad Din Taseer, the Principal of S.P. College, Srinagar then, who they say, was also associated with its scripting. Taseer Sahib was married to Faiz Ahmed Faiz's wife's sister. This play greatly influenced my young sensibility. That is why I too yearned to become a member of the College Dramatic club, which I did, after entering the college in 1943 and even became its General Secretary.

I came into Mohanlal Aima's contact after nearly four years after that, when we had formed The National Cultural Front when Pakistan had sent the *Qabailis* (tribals) followed by its army to try to occupy Kashmir by force in 1947. Aima had by then completed his law degree and had started participating in the people's movement, singing patriotic songs like 'Hamalawar Khabardar Hum Kashmiri Hain Tayyar', and folk songs, like 'Zail punjrow mein z nazar trive, baeil asi mai tambalaav' and 'Rinda poshimaal

gindane driy lolo’ It was a time when the National Cultural Front was planning the staging of the powerful Urdu play ‘*Kashmir Yeh Hai*’ written by our Urdu Professor in college, Prof. Mahmood Hashmi, who too had joined us in our crusade to boost the morale of the people to get united to fight the invaders. How Prof. Mahmood Hashmi, a Mirporian, later on crossed over to the other side of Kashmir is a different story. Now my focus is Mohanlal Aima. In fact this play *Kashmir Yeh Hai* brought us together. While discussing and finalizing the casting of this play with Prof. Mahmood Hashmi, the writer, and other members I suggested Aima’s name, considering his tall personality, and acting acumen in acting, to suit the character of a tribal chief. This was the first play in which women characters were being played by women and not boys. These daring girls were led by Usha Kashyap, a politically motivated artist by the progressive movement that had taken strong roots amongst educated youngsters. A niece of the great Balraj Sahni, Usha too had a magnetic personality and was the symbol of Maej Kasheer (Mother Kashmir) in the play. Her participation encouraged other girls belonging to respectable families like Dr. Lakhwara’s daughters, Sumitra and Santosh, Begum Jalaludin’s daughter Khursheed (later on Mrs. Bakhshi Gulam Mohammad), to become part of the cast. *Kashmir Yeh Hai* ran for many weeks in a jam-packed S. P. College hall and brought Aima into the limelight. And thus, he too joined our bandwagon of the National Cultural Front. He played the greedy tyrant *zaildar* in our open air dramas that we staged in village after village to awaken the courage of the downtrodden peasants to rise and fight for their rights. Aima’s last plays as an actor were *Shaheed Sherwani* written by Premnath Pardesi and the first production of Dina Nath Nadim’s classic opera, *Bombur Yamberzal* that I had jointly produced and directed with him. In fact it was he, who also composed the music of the opera assisted by Virender Mohan, a budding artist then.

Bombur Yamberzal was later on produced again when the Russian leaders Nikita Khrushchev and Marshall Bulganin visited Kashmir. This time it was directed by me and I retained the tunes

composed by Aima. While the entire orchestration was changed by the young composer, Virender Mohan, who had been earlier assisting Mohanlal Aima, it was this opera that established Aima as a music composer. After joining Radio Kashmir he concentrated on music and did not act again.

During his early days in the radio, Aima was sent on deputation to Radio Kabul to study the similarities in music that we had developed here and the music Afghanistan had. Though after that, he was mostly posted outside Kashmir, his association with the music scene in Kashmir continued, especially his contact with me. It was due to that association that when the mantle of the making of the first ever feature film in Kashmiri, *Mainzraat*, fell on me, I could not think of any other person than Mohanlal Aima to compose its music. This film was adjudged the best feature film in the regional film category in the National Film Awards Festival where it won the President's Silver Medal. Even after that, when the first bilingual feature film *Shair-e - Kashmir Mehjoor* in colour was being produced, we, i.e. Prabhat Mukerji the producer and director of the Hindi version, and I, the director of the Kashmiri version, got Mohanlal Aima to compose the music for it, which was recorded in the music studios of Radio Kashmir Srinagar. Radio Kashmir Srinagar, thus contributed in a major way even to the development of films in Kashmir. The music direction of the Hindi version was assigned to Prem Dhawan from Bombay. Even before that, Aima had composed music for the Hindi film 'Pamposh' directed by Ezra Mir. To sum up, it was Mohanlal Aima who laid the foundation of the development of Kashmiri music in the state, of course under the patronage of Radio Kashmir. It was not only he but also I who had been encouraged by this organization to venture into other related fields of creativity.

Continuing with the contribution of Radio Kashmir to the resurgence of Kashmiri folk music this organization became the source of discovering a large number of gifted folk singers even from far flung areas of the state. Mirza Ghulam Hasan Beg Arif, the first Director of Programmes of Radio Kashmir Srinagar,

introduced Ghulam Mohammad Butt from district Anantnag. Popularly known as *Bulbul Hazar Dastan* (the nightingale of the Arabian Nights) by his admirers back home, he had a remarkable range in his voice which was very effectively used by different composers in counterbalancing melodies. A very soft spoken person, Ghulam Mohammad Butt was a tiger of a **percussionist**, with a great sense of rhythm. If I say that it was he who established *tumbaknari* as a regular percussion instrument, not only in Kashmiri folk music but also in orchestration and light music compositions, it would not be an **exaggeration**. He was basically a fine **embroiderer** of the famous **woolen rugs** of Kashmir known as 'gabbas'. But after coming on the staff of Radio Kashmir, he would exhibit this talent only to oblige some of his colleagues by turning their old blankets into a feast of colourfully designed *gabbas* (woolen floor covering rugs). He was commissioned whenever any special music was recorded by other organizations like the State Academy or film production houses. He even had the hobby of orally responding to different bird calls and then **mimicking** them, which we used as sound effects in different programmes. He grew with Radio Kashmir Srinagar and gracefully retired at the age of sixty.

Another colourful folk singer who got attached to Radio Kashmir from almost its inception was Ghulam Qadir Langoo. A shoemaker by profession, he was a solo singer who would play on his *saran* (a **diminutive** of the Indian *sarangi*) while singing. He would say with pride that his family was the Maharaja's neighbour because he lived in the small *mohalla* adjacent to the Royal Palace built on the bank of the river Jhelum across the *Badshah* bridge. He claimed that his family even sang for the maharaja. He in fact kept on hanging around Mohanlal Aima, who was Head of the Music Section for quite some time, and finally got into broadcasting, first as a casual artist and then as a staff artist. His biggest contribution to broadcasting in Kashmir was that he introduced the veteran singer Raj Begum to Radio Kashmir. Credit goes to his sincere passion to somehow contribute to music programmes. He worked hard and ultimately became a *tanpoora* player.

I remember the day when he brought Raj Begum to the studio - He introduced her as Raj Begum Langoo. In fact she was introduced to even the listeners as such for a day or two. This mistake was rectified when she herself objected to it and said that she wasn't related to him. But it is a fact that she had had her initial training from him. Ghulam Qadir Langoo had a *sufi* bent of mind and a very individual style of *chhakri* singing. He was a fine mimic and would feel happy by entertaining people by his mimicking the soprano singing of British singers whom he possibly might have heard while hanging around the erstwhile Srinagar Club. I used this talent of his in my stage production of the opera *Tipu Sultan*, for the J& k Academy, while recording the music for the *drunken* and *boisterous* party scene of the British soldiers after a victory over Tipu Sultan. His ambition was that his son should learn Indian classical music and become a regular sarangi player. For this he sought the guidance of Vedlal Vakil, a classical singer who was on our staff for some time. In this effort he succeeded to some extent. But later on he tried his hand at it and became a regular *tabla* player.

The discovery of Raj Begum was followed by the discovery of another popular singer, Naseem Akhtar. Naseem Akhtar belonged to the area adjacent to Batamaloo, where the employees of the erstwhile Maharaja's army and his state band were settled. Her voice was as delicate as her personality. She too, like Raj Begum, became popular earlier than expected. Besides their individual performances, their duets became hugely popular like Mirza Arif's famous song '*rum gayam sheesheys begur gaw bana myone, saqiya waerith ratya paimana myone*'. Seeing their popularity and the prestige and respectability Radio Kashmir had gained by now, young educated girls like Mohini Shangloo, Asha Kaul and others came forward to enrich our light music programmes. It was unfortunate that these girls would get lost to broadcasting, as soon as they got married. But others kept on joining the caravan.

Coming back to the era of Raj Begum and Naseem Akhtar, there appeared another star on the horizon of Kashmiri music whose

talent nobody could match till his death. And, that was Ghulam Hasan Sofi. I have mentioned earlier that we were not then bound by departmental rules of audition which the artists had to clear before they would go on air. We had a free hand to scout talent. Discovering talent had become a passion for all of us.

The Chief of the Officers on Special Duty from All India Radio to help and guide us to establish broadcasting in Kashmir was Amrit Lal Maini, who even later on was posted in Srinagar in different capacities after Radio Kashmir was taken over by the centre. He was living in a small bungalow at the foothill of Shankracharya on Gupkar road that had been allotted to him by the state government. One fine morning when he came to the office, he was accompanied by a short man who looked even shorter in comparison to Shri Maini who was quite tall. We watched them coming towards our office which was then in the bungalow just outside the western gate of the Emporium Garden. We were **intrigued** as Maini Sahib was leading him, holding his hand. This young man had a harmonium hanging by a stray chord around his shoulder. Maini Sahib led him straight to the rehearsal room on the ground floor and sent word for us to come there. On entering the room we found that this slight young man was almost blind. That was why Maini Sahib was holding his hand. Maini Sahib introduced this man to us. "This is Hasan Sofi, Ghulam Hasan Sofi. Just listen to him and you will be mesmerized by his singing." When, after having a cup of tea, this very unimpressive young man in worn out clothes started playing on the harmonium we were amazed and looked at each other. He seemed to have a command over the instrument, and when he started singing, everyone was really mesmerized. He finished one song and without waiting, started another. He was not bothered that auditioning was on, nor was he conscious of who was around. He was, as if, immersed in himself. It was Maini Sahib, who, after a couple of songs, asked him to stop and have another cup of tea which had been meanwhile ordered.

We were keen to know from where Maini Sahib had found Hasan. He told us that Ghulam Hasan was a **wandering minstrel**

and had by chance entered his house to sing and collect some *baksheesh*. That was also how Ghulam Hasan Sofi from Drogjan, Dalgate, who became a legend later on, was discovered. His popularity soon surpassed the popularity of the best of our artists. So much so, that when we had to record the songs for the feature films, *Mainzraat* and *Shair-e- Kashmir Mehjoor* he became the obvious choice to be the leading voice. Even for the tele-film *Habba Khatoon* directed by Bashir Badgami, he became the main singer. The songs he sang and recorded for the radio became a rage. Songs like 'Rozoo rozoo bozo myen zar madano' which he sang for the feature film 'Mehjoor' became the prize item in all the concerts he participated in. This very song was later on copied by Shameema Dev, who added the required female pathos. The songs he sang for the operas *Vitasta* and *Himala Ke Chashme* were acclaimed as authentic specimens of the music of Kashmir. The credit for this goes to Virender Mohan, Krishen Langoo and T. K. Jalali the music directors too. His recordings, whether on cassettes, CDS or Mp3 turned out to be prized possessions of the connoisseurs of music even in some countries abroad.

While recording the music for the above operas, I was amazed to see how he would cast a terribly angry look at an instrumentalist playing even a slightly wrong note. Most of the songs he sang which became popular were his own compositions. He was, like every great artist, extremely moody and would run away, if irritated, leaving the recording unfinished.

I had the good fortune of having earned his special affection. But even I once had a taste of his tantrums. I was recording, Ali Mohammad Sheikh, Ghulam Hasan Sofi and Jahanara Janbaz for a couple of albums for the J & K Academy in Tagore Hall, Srinagar. Krishen Langoo was the composer. We had finished recording Ali Mohammad Sheikh and his party and were now recording Ghulam Hasan Sofi. After he finished singing his very popular song '*Aftaab deeshith chha zoon mandachan*', he abruptly got up, picked up his *sarangi* and started to leave the stage. I asked him where he was going. There were two more songs to be recorded. "Leave them

for tomorrow. I can't wait any longer." He turned down my pleas and also the requests from the other artists and said that it was already very late. I told him that my car would drop him home. I was surprised at his obstinacy and was getting annoyed. Seeing this, his attitude softened, and coming closer, he begging pardon said, "Have I ever behaved like this with you Pran Sahab? But I cannot stay. Kindly tell the driver to drop me. Krishen Ji will tell you why I have to go." I was annoyed with Krishen Langoon too who was mum all along. When I turned to him, he said, "Let him go sir. He knows that you have to go to Delhi the day after. Don't worry! We shall finish all the other songs tomorrow." So I asked the driver to drop him wherever he had to go. After he left, I asked Krishen Langoon the reason for Sofi's sullen obstinacy. Krishen Ji replied in his jocular style. "It is a matter of heart, sir. You probably do not know that he has fallen in love with a lady living in the backwaters of the Dal Lake and has managed to marry her. So he now lives with her there. She rows to the Chashma Shahi boat landing in the evenings and waits for him to ferry him back to their hut in the backwaters of the lake." As it was really not only a matter of the heart but also of compassion, I sympathised with him. Needless to say, the next day he came on time which he seldom did and gave his best while recording the remaining songs.

Another talented singer from the same Dalgate area to which Hasan Sofi belonged, and discovered in a similar manner, was Ghulam Mohammad Kalloo. Kalloo had a melodious voice with pathos in it. He used to sing to the accompaniment of his banjo. As we were not bound by the strict rules of All India Radio then, which did not allow even the harmonium to be used as an accompaniment, we allowed Ghulam Mohammad Kalloo to broadcast along with his banjo, which he did till we became part of All India Radio. A very cultured and soft spoken person, he, later on, became a staff artist and an integral part of the music section. He had the blessings of his spiritual mentor because of which he had with him a large repertoire of Sufi compositions. His talented son, who had learnt playing the clarinet from the greatest

clarinet player of Kashmir, ^{Digitized By eGangotri} Nasserullah Khan, too became later on, a staff artist and carried forward the legacy of his father. While writing these **reminiscences**, the image of Ghulam Mohammad Kalloo, sitting at a table, going through the catalogues of music recordings, earmarking the items to be broadcast and then hurrying to the library to sort out the tapes or the discs to be handed over to the duty officer, is still another frieze in my memory.

As the days passed, Radio Kashmir kept **striving** to attain professional perfection to compete with advanced broadcasters not only in India but all over the world. Thus, the spectrum of its artists in every branch of broadcasting expanded. The hours of broadcasting too kept on increasing. In this process, which was a continuous one, highly talented singers and musicians were discovered who withstood the tough process of auditions and enriched the popularity of our broadcasts.

While recollecting my more than three decades in broadcasting the names of Ghulam Mohammad Rah and Ali Mohammad Nishtar flash into my memory, leading a long caravan of light music singers. Ghulam Mohammad Rah's fans would call him the Mohammad Rafi of Kashmir. His voice had definitely some shade of the **timbre** in his voice, as that of Mohammad Rafi. He had an advantage, that his Urdu pronunciation was much better than many of the other Kashmiri singers except Ali Mohammad Nishtar. When Dina Nath Nadim's classic opera '*Bombur Yaberzal*' was taken up for production by the National Cultural Front, Mohanlal Aima, who was composing its music, selected Rah for the lead in the chorus songs including the popular *Bomburo Bomburo* song. He even enacted the role of *Gulala*, the red Kashmiri tulip, in the opera on stage. He kept on participating in Radio Kashmir concerts as a solo artist as well as a lead singer, in choral singing. He had a long range and could go up to the third octave. As such, we used this quality of his effectively in the feature film *Shair-e-Kashmir Mehjoor* in two of Mehjoor Sahib's revolutionary songs, '*Volo Ha Bagwano Naubaharuk shan Paida Kar*' and '*Subuh Chum Bagh Chum Mastana Dil Chum Taza Yavun Chum*'. In the Hindi version,

it was sung by the great Manna Dey.

The second popular singer was Ali Mohammad Nishtar. He was the brother of our scholar and poet colleague Abdul Haq Burq. And as such, was well versed with literature. He too had a long range besides a melodious voice. He rose from a salesman selling shoes to become a popular singer and a star attraction in the Kashmir wing of Song and Drama, Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India. His ethereal rendering of *Bismica Yahoo* in the famous opera *Vitasta*, shall always remain an example of the mesmerism that a melodious voice coming from the depths of one's heart, can create. I have seen it happen while staging this opera in various cities of the country. When the music would stop and Nishtar's lone voice would come up in the pin drop silence of the hall, vibrating all around, its effect was tremendous.

Ali Mohammad Nishtar was soft spoken, rather reserved, as against Ghulam Mohammad Rah who was boisterous and would mix easily with others. It was unfortunate that Rah hit the bottle which not only drastically affected his talent but also brought about his end in the prime of his youth. Nishtar, coming from a family of *Pirs* was very much sought after, for broadcasts during the month of *Ramazan*. His rendition of 'naats' added deep devotion to the *Sahri* programmes during that holy month.

Before going ahead, it will not be out of place to mention here, the lovable and ever jovial Jalal Geelani. Though he will also appear in the chapter on Announcers, News Readers and other broadcasters, he must appear here too, along with our popular singers. A shorter than the common Kashmiri's height, Jalal had a unique softness in his voice that stood out in contrast to Ghulam Mohammad Rah and Nishtar's voices. Born in a family of the *Sajada Nasheens* of the most revered Dargah of Dastaagir Sahib, God had bestowed purity of *sur* and *soz* on him. Being preoccupied with his duty as an announcer, he would not frequently participate in music programmes as an artist of the day, but would find time and lend his voice to special programmes. The *Naats* sung by him had a unique mystique of intense devotion. His priceless contribution

was the rendering of the ^{Digitized By eGangotri} Mughal Governor of Kashmir, Ali Mardaani Khan's ode to Lord Shiva, who had seen Him in a dream and written an ode to the Lord:

*"Uma Asl-e -Mahashwar Bood Shab Shah-e- Ki Man Deedam
Ghazanfar Charm Dar Bar Bood Shab Shah-e- Ki Man
Deedam."*

Then there were a host of other light music singers whose names must be recorded here for posterity. They were the blind singers Assad Ullah and Dwarikanath Kaul, ghazal and bhajan singers Prithvi Nath Raina, Omkar Nath Kaul, Ghulam Mohammad Mir, Iqbal Kaul, Raza Ali Banka and others. These stalwarts had laid the foundation for the development of Kashmiri light music that encouraged a large number of young boys and girls to learn the basics of Indian classical music, to become fully proficient in this art. Some of them, especially the girls, selected it as a subject and graduated in it with distinction.

Probably the first student of Indian classical music was Rageshwari Dhar Mattu, followed by her sister Jaijaiwanti Dhar Parimoo. The talent of both the sisters had been discovered by their father, the social rebel and activist, Pandit Vedlal Vakil in their very childhood. Vedlal ji was one of the earliest classical singers of Kashmir, who joined Radio Kashmir as a long term casual artist only in the sixties. He was such a lover of music that he had selected two of his favourite ragas, Rageshwari and Jaijaiwanti, as the names for his two daughters. Both of them became lecturers of music in the Government Women's Colleges in Srinagar. Rageshwari later on rose to the status of the Principal of Teachers' Training College of Srinagar. Rageshwari had a very soft and melodious voice. I recorded the *Wakhs of Laleshwari*, translated into Hindi by Dr Shashi Shekhar Toshkhani in her voice for the National Programme of Classics on *Lal Ded* jointly written by Prof. Jayalal Kaul and me for which, the Kashmiri *Wakhs* were rendered by Raj Begum. Both these Dhar sisters discontinued participating in our music programmes because of reasons best known to them. Rageshwari had become a disciple of the Queen of *ghazal* singing,

Begum Akhtar who even asked her to accompany her in a couple of live concerts in Srinagar. Another contribution to music by Pandit Vedlal Vakil was training his son, Vitasta Putra, who, by profession although an engineer, continued broadcasting till the **exodus** of Kashmiri Pundits from Kashmir. He was a good *ghazal* singer.

From amongst the women singers who got regular training in Indian classical music, the names of Shameema Dev, Kailash Mehra and Arti Tikoo stand out. Shameema and Kailash got their training from Pandit Shambhoo Nath Sopori, the veteran sitar player, whose contribution to the promotion of this art in Kashmir is highly commendable. He taught music first in Arya Samaj High School in Wazir Bagh and then in Govt. College for Women, Srinagar. The two disciples of Sopori Sahib, Shameem Dev and Kailash Mehra brought freshness and **sophistication** not only to Kashmiri songs but to the entire gamut of folk and light music of Jammu & Kashmir. Shameema Dev and Kailash Mehra took the entire Kashmir valley by storm, so to say. They were star attractions in the concerts they participated in. I had the privilege of working with both of them in my radio programmes as well as in my stage productions of the operas, *Vitasta*, *Himala Ke Chashme*, and *Piya Baj Pyala*, for The Jammu & Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages. Both Shameem and Kailash's voices mesmerized thousands of **spectators** in almost all the major cities of the country where these operas were staged. They had the unique quality of easily picking up songs of different languages. I used this quality in Shameema Dev to pick up a very popular Bengali *Baul* song 'Guru Omai Upai Bolona', with which we started the concert of music and dances of Jammu and Kashmir in The Festival Of Kashmir in 1976 in Calcutta. This concert and the Opera *Vitasta* which was the prize attraction of the festival became talk of the town in Kolkata. Shameema's voice was so mesmerizing that The Gramophone Company of India cut a disc of not only the Bengali *Baul* song that she sang in the concerts, but also her Kashmiri song 'Katue Chukh Nundabane, Wola Mashoka Myane., besides Faiz Ahmed Faiz's *ghazal* 'Hum Par Tumhari Chah Ka Ilzam Hi to

Hai'. The director of the gramophone company very proudly told me and Shameem that the great K. L. Saigal too had recorded quite a few songs in that very studio in which they recorded Shameem Dev. I came to know later on, that hundreds of copies of Shameem's recording were sold by them.

After that *Baul* song in Bengali, we made Shameema Dev prepare a Telugu devotional song '*Palvelina pilangrovi*' to be presented in The Kashmir Festival 1977 that was held in Hyderabad. It was an *adulation* of Lord Bala Ji. She sang it so well that it became news in the national press and All India Radio. Seeing a Kashmiri girl singing the famous Telugu devotional song with such perfection, Balaji *Sansthan* and the devotees of the Lord were so moved that they honoured her with a gold medal for this achievement. I remember how we had to deviate from the scheduled time of the presentation of our very popular opera," "*Piya Baj Pyala*", in Kamani Auditorium in Delhi because the then President of India Dr. Sanjiva Reddy who was the chief guest, wanted to listen to this devotional song for which Shameem had been honoured.

Similarly, Kailash Mehra took audiences by storm when she sang a Malayalam song in the Kashmir Festival in 1978 held in Thiruvanthapuram (Trivandrum then) and other south Indian states. Both these singers ruled the light music scene not only in radio but also in Doordarshan telecasts, besides the music festivals organised by different cultural organisations in the state and outside. They later on performed in foreign countries too. Complementary to Shameema and Kailash was Arti Tikoo Kaul. She was, in fact, encouraged by both of them to appear for the audition in which she fared very well. She had almost the same character in her voice and would very favourably *jell* with their voices. I used her voice too, in my radio and stage productions. Properly trained in Indian classical music under the guidance of Tej Kishen Jalali, the former Principal of The Institute of Music and Fine Arts, who is himself an excellent classical as well as a light music artist, Aarti too became very popular. She rendered the *intricate* and unique meters

CHHAKRI AND ROUF

The entire populace of Kashmir, old and young, loves its folk music as passionately as do the people of any other region. There being no other form of entertainment, folk music sustained the Kashmiris' spirits even in the worst of circumstances in their tumultuous past. Folk music eased their agony while tilling the lands of the landlords, through the long strained songs mostly composed by them, which did not have any particular rhythm patterns in the beginning and sounded like long chants. Then they must have used the earthen pitcher in which they carried water, to add rhythm to these songs, when after a day of drudgery, they would sit together on the threshold of their hutments and sing to relax. This gave birth to the genre of, '*Nenda Baeth*' (weeding songs) the songs they sang to ease the strain of their labour while sowing seeds, de-weeding paddy fields, and harvesting crops. Gradually these farmers started using the poems of popular poets of their area too. These farmers' songs are popular even today and have become an integral part of the folk music of Kashmir.

The most popular form of our folk music, *Chhakri* too must have got birth in our villages, because the best singers of *Chhakri* came from our villages. In fact, this form of our folk music too must have evolved from the *Nenda Baeth* compositions. With the passage of time, music of the neighbouring countries, like Central Asian countries and Afghanistan must have added to its development. This is evident from the introduction of the *rabab* and *saran* as accompanying instruments in it, which are basically essential instruments of Afghan music. Even *tumbaknari* the main

percussion instrument in Kashmiri folk music is akin to the percussion instrument *Zeribaghli* of Afghan music. Even the word *Tumbak* is Dari, the Persian language the Afghans speak. We saw a similar percussion instrument in the orchestra of the artists from Chinese Sinkiang who performed in the 12th Festival of Asian Arts. The only difference was, that the circular head was wider and the neck shorter than our *Tumbaknari*.

Before becoming an integral part of the music broadcasts of Radio Kashmir, *chhakri* was part and parcel of our jubilations and festivals, like marriage ceremonies and folk festivals throughout the valley. And as such every region had its favourite *chhakri* groups, which were much sought after by the local population. Their fame was confined only to their own regions. Because of this, they would be without work once the season of marriages or festivals was over. And when Radio Kashmir Srinagar was established, these artists too got a platform for the projection of their talent. So, with the passage of time, the best talented artists soon became household names and their material prosperity increased. Because of the popularity over the radio, *chhakri* groups emerged in the city too. There started a healthy competition too between these groups resulting in the infusion of new life into the style of presentation. New lyrics and new melodies were introduced. Much sought after, they were booked for individual concerts too. Thus, this genre of our music, while retaining its rustic flavour, imbibed sophistication and earned universal acceptability. We were amazed by the ever increasing number of *chhakri* parties that came for auditions. Unfortunately, a majority of them failed to get through. After a series of auditions if a really talented group led by a master leader would be discovered, it would be a celebration for, not only the in-charge of the Music Section, but also for the staff whom he, in exuberance, would invite to listen to the recording of the audition. That is how great masters such as Ali Mohammad Sheikh, Ghulam Ahmed Sofi, and Ghulam Mohammad Dar and others were discovered. Their melodious voices warmed the coldest of hearts. Who can forget the magic of Ali Mohammad Sheikh's

Shama Sonder Bara Kernas Ta Lolo, Ghulam Ahmed Sofi's *Shash Rang*, or Ghulam Mohammad Dar's *Krala Koor*.

Ghulam Mohammad Dar and his party, under the leadership of Mohanlal Aima was the first group of artists to be invited to perform in Delhi in Rashtrapati Bhavan and many other national events. The **robust** rhythm patterns and the variety of the melodies of this folk form of music enthralled audiences of other countries too. Another innovation that was made by a couple of leading *chhakri* singers was the introduction of *Rouf* that followed the main lyric with which a *chhakri* concert would end. *Rouf* is mainly a dance form and as such the rhythm is faster and gains momentum, and that makes every foot tap and every leg shake. This innovation turned so popular that it became an integral part of every *chhakri* programme and continues to be so even now. Here, I am again tempted to **digress** a little.

I was nominated by the Sangeet Natak Akademi (The National Academy of Performing Arts) to suggest, organize and lead a delegation of singers and dancers to represent India in the 12th. Festival of Asian Arts to be held in Hong Kong in 1988 in which, besides Hong Kong, artists from Australia, China, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, and Turkey were participating. I naturally therefore proposed to take a **contingent** from Kashmir, which was accepted by the organizers. It was a great experience. But greater was the **revelation** that our main strength is our folk music and not our dances.

Our star attraction became Ali Mohammad Sheikh with his party. Though our programme was not sponsored by Radio Kashmir, it was indirectly connected, as almost all the artists selected were picked from its programmes. That is why I am making it a part of these memories.

Coming back to the Festival of Asian Arts, our first performance was scheduled to be staged in City Hall of Hong Kong. It was the peak of the tourist season for that country, and as such the city was **bursting** to the seams with thousands of tourists from all over the world. A day before the performance, the Chinese liaison officer

came to inform me that we had to send a small group of our artists to present a short programme in the **foyer** of the hall as a curtain raiser, so that people could get a feel of the programme they were going to witness the next day. I was confused and could not decide which of our programmes would suit the occasion. So, I consulted Krishen Langoo, the music director of the programme, and we jointly decided to send Ali Mohammad Sheikh with his party there, to give a brief performance. He readily agreed. I sent Dilip Langoo, my assistant, with him as Ali Mohammad Sheikh could communicate in no other language than Kashmiri. So, relaxed, we got busy in the next day's preparations.

A couple of hours passed, but Ali Mohammad Sheikh did not return. He should not have taken so much of time as City Hall was at a stone's throw from our hotel and he had the station wagon with him. When another hour passed and there was no trace of the artists I got worried and told Krishen that we must go and find out as to what had happened. We took a cab and reached City Hall. We rushed into the vast foyer. There was a large crowd assembled there, encircling Ali Mohammad Sheikh who was lost in his singing and the crowd, comprising mostly foreigners, clapping and enjoying his singing. We made our way through the crowd and reached Dilip Langoo who was standing near the artists and told him that the programme had to be a short one and questioned him why they were still there. He replied, "Sir, don't you see the crowd? They won't let him stop." I forgot my anger and felt elated that our folk music had the power of mesmerizing even those who did not understand the language. And the next day and the days after, it was **heartening** that our performances comprising different forms of Kashmiri music and dance drew large crowds wherever we performed and Ali Mohammad Sheikh was the star attraction everywhere. The Hong Kong press gave our Chhakri and Nenda Baaeth programmes and of course Ali Mohammad Sheikh rave reviews. So much so, that the leader of the troupe from Japan came to me and asked me how busy Ali Mohammad Sheikh was going to be in the months to come. To increase the prestige of our

artist, I replied that he would be quite busy. I was *intrigued* and asked him, "Why are you asking me?" "We would like to introduce him to the people of our county. We shall arrange for everything, his travel, his stay and of course a respectable remuneration." I was thrilled and told him that I would ask the artist, and then, come back to him. To cut it short, I gave this good news to Ali Mohammad Sheikh who was not at all thrilled, probably because it meant going to an alien land and not knowing any other language than his mother tongue, would be lost. But when I told him that they have agreed to allow him to bring along an interpreter from Kashmir, he consented. The leader of the Japanese contingent took Ali Mohammad Sheikh's address with other details and said that he would keep in touch. That is how Ali Mohammad Sheikh got motivated to travel to Japan. And when the official invitation came, he, along with his party, went and performed in half a dozen Japanese cities and earned laurels and of course a *sumptuous* remuneration too.

While talking about the strength of our folk music I am reminded of another incident. Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad was the Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir then. It was in his tenure that a Conference of International Hoteliers and Travel Agents was held in Srinagar for the first time. In those days big events were held in the erstwhile Tourist Centre hall. As was the practice, Radio Kashmir had to organize a cultural evening for the dignitaries comprising mostly foreigners. The programme started after the dinner that had been arranged in the smaller hall. The last item was *Chhakri* and *Rouf* presented by Zoon Begum and some other women artists. When the rhythm, keeping pace with the melody of the *Rouf* got charged, men and women in the audience could hold themselves back no longer and got up to dance. Zoon Begum too, along with her party, was enjoying and kept on stepping up the pace of the rhythm. Finally, the dancers stopped when they got really exhausted.

Times kept changing and with that *chhakri* and *Bacha Naghma* concerts too. Female singers and dancers had taken the place of *Bachhas* (the boy singer dancers). The first woman who had paved

the way for others was Zoon Begum. With her haunting voice and pleasant personality, she set many live concerts on fire. Her debut over the Radio added tremendously to her popularity. While writing about Zoon Begum, I am taken back to the year 1953 when we, the members of the National Cultural Congress, were planning to stage Dinanath Nadim's opera, *Bombur Yamberzal*, (*Narcissus & the Bumble Bee*) which was being jointly directed by Mohanlal Aima and me. That was the time when our society had not opened up. The few women singers we had at that time could have fitted the role of *Yamberzal*, the heroine. But motivating them to act, dance and sing on stage was impossible. It was Mohanlal Aima, who was also composing the music for the opera in frustration, suggested that we should talk to Zoon Begum. Nadim Sahib too, seeing that no other alternative was there, somehow agreed that we should give her a try. It was after a lot of persuasion that Zoon Begum's husband agreed to let her enact the role. Zoon Begum was illiterate. Cramming a *ghazal* or two was one thing, and to memorise the long scenes of the opera and understand the meaning of the words was no easy task. But we were amazed at her power of memorizing the lines. Though it took a lot of time to make her understand the nuances of the lyrics even then the effort was worthwhile. She was thrilled like a child when we would start the rehearsals. And when she saw herself in the mirror after her makeup was completed on the final day of the rehearsal, she burst into tears and wailed, "That was the real me when, at the age of twelve my father got me married to this Nyama" looking at her husband who was standing nearby, "If I too had read the alphabets I also would have become a film heroine. I am not joking." And then she burst into a laugh, covering her emotions. Needless to say, she did carry off the role of *Yamberzal* with ease, and the shows in Nead's Hotel Hall became talk of the town. She sang all her songs with intense pathos and became very popular at that time, thanks to Aima's tunes and the orchestration, assisted by Virender Mohan.

Talking about Zoon Begum, I am reminded of another incident. It was the year 1959. I had been transferred from Srinagar along

with Bashir Butt and Ali Mohammad Lone. Bashir Butt and I were transferred to All India Radio, Jalandhar, and Ali Mohammad Lone, to Delhi. (The reasons for these transfers shall come up later in these memoirs.) I had travelled to Delhi from Jalandhar for a meeting. After the first session, we, i.e. Ali Mohammad Lone and I were going to another friend K. R. Pandey's room to have lunch with him in Akashvani Bhavan. While walking through the foyer, we saw a very excited person leading a friend towards the music studio telling him, "God! You should listen to her. Another Reshma! Come! They are recording her." So we too got excited and followed them. As soon as they opened the secured door leading to the studio, the song, '*Ba Ti Na Yi Doorer Chone Zarai Bal Marraeyo.*' was going on and I whispered to Lone in Kashmiri, '*Yi karoo cha ameatch?*' (When did she come?) so that the other two persons' excitement did not get dampened. We saw that quite a few other members of the staff too gathered in the Recording Room adjacent to the music studio including the well known music producer Satish Bhatia, who saw us and stood up and congratulated us, "What a singer! Wah! Pure folk!" We both felt elated that an artist from our land was being appreciated with so much fervour.

We forgot our lunch and waited for the recording to be over, so that we would meet Zoon Begum and enquire from her as to how she happened to be in Delhi. Both Lone and I were undergoing the pangs of separation from our home overwhelming. An artist, whom we had nurtured and encouraged, was in Delhi and we did not know how and why. Anyway, when Zoon Begum suddenly saw us there, she rushed to meet us. It was a very happy moment. We came to know from her that she had come for a folk music concert organized by the Academy and would be going back the next day. That was Zoon Begum with a unique rustic passion in her voice. Many artists have sung the famous song '*Bati na yi doorer chone zarai bal marayo*' after her. But none could reach the depths of pathos that she would add while singing.

It was the popularity of Zoon Begum that quite a few *chhakri* parties started to look for female artists to become their lead singers

and dancers replacing the men dancers. That is how Sonder Begum, Gulzar Begum, and Haseena Akhtar and others appeared on the scene. Some of them later on appeared on television too and became popular because of the added visual appeal. And as they say, the tribe kept on increasing.



THE INSTRUMENTALISTS

In the beginning, Radio Kashmir Srinagar had a limited team of instrumentalists forming our orchestra. It had a couple of sitar players and a *rababi*, a Kashmiri *sarangi* player, a tabla player, one *tumbaknari* percussionist and a santoor player from the sufiana troupe. The sitar players were Prem Nath Chhatu, and Ghulam Ahmmed, both trained in Indian classical music. The first *rabab* player was Sannaullah, a wizard of a musician. During my entire life in broadcasting and recording music for my stage and film productions, I had the good fortune of working with a large number of *rabab* players, but I have not found a player as versatile as Sannaullah Butt. How we came across this great musician is by itself an interesting story.

In the summer of 1947, as in the past, a professional dance troupe had come from Lahore to entertain people that came to see the Industrial Exhibition, an annual event. Unfortunately when the country got divided, communal riots that had started even before the Partition, broke into a fury. Kashmir was unaffected and continued to be an abode of love, yet it got a taste of the riots because of the Qabaili raid. This dance troupe from Lahore got dispersed and most of the artists who belonged to this side of the country somehow managed to leave Kashmir but two artists, Tufail Ali and Talib Hussain both hailing from Lahore got stuck here. It was due to the benevolence of Khwaja Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq that they were attached to the National Cultural Front for protection and sustenance. Radio Kashmir Srinagar had not yet been launched and I was still with the National Cultural Front. So both these artists

would participate in our programmes there, even travelling with us to the villages where we would go to stage our plays of awakening. One day Tufail Ali brought a man with a *rabab* to our rehearsal room in the exhibition grounds, where we had assembled for the daily meeting. He introduced him to us and said, "*Sahib main heera dhoond ke laya hoon - Iska rabab suniye!*" We all became **inquisitive**, all of us, Peer Abdul Ahad Shah, the secretary of the Front, Mohanlal Aima, Prem Nath Pardesi, Som Nath Zutshi, Abdul Ghani Namtahali and others. We asked Sanaullah to start. He asked Tufail Ali that he will have to play the tabla with him. We pointed to Hari Nath Tarozdar, a sub inspector of police, deputed by the Government to the National Cultural Front, because of his talent as a tabla player and told Sanaullah that he would accompany him. But he insisted that Tufail Ali should accompany him. Tufail Ali **reluctantly** sat down and held the tabla. And in no time the magic started. It was a **revelation** that a great maestro of the *rabab*, *Sanaullah* had been found. Not only that but also that a great tabla player Tufail Ali was with us and we were up to then, unaware of his talent.

It was 1st July, 1948, the auspicious day on which broadcasting was to begin in Srinagar. The final preparations for launching of the Radio Station were in full swing and we, the artists from The National Cultural Front had arrived at Polo Ground, where the studios were established in one of the Maharaja's Polo Pavilions, for rehearsals. Naturally, Tufail Ali also was with us. He was dressed shabbily and as such was taking cover behind the others. When Hayat Ansari, who had been temporarily sent from All India Radio, to help the local staff to get the Radio Station started, saw us, he led us to where some other artists were waiting. While talking to us he noticed Tufail Ali and rushed to him and exclaimed "Tufail, you? Here? O God what a surprise!" We all got confused. But Mr. Ansari cleared our confusion. "He is Tufail Ali, the legendary tabla maestro." "But he never told us that!" "That is his greatness!" We had heard that some Tufail Ali in Lahore had almost the same standing amongst the tabla players at that time, as that of Ustad

Ahmed Jan Thirakwa. We had never imagined that this unassuming man was really that great master Tufail Ali who had been with us for so many months travelling together with us from village to village to receive a dole for a living. His humility was remarkable for, he had never given us even an *inkling* of being such a great artist. He used to be gloomy because he was stuck in Kashmir, because of the partition of the country with his family there in Lahore in Pakistan. He had no news of his family. He had a daughter whom he loved more than his life. Sadiq Sahib who was the president of The National Cultural Front, again came to his rescue and through his good offices, Tufail Ali ultimately got *repatriated* to Pakistan and to his home in Lahore. But his nephew Talib Hussain opted to stay back as he was offered a job in Radio Kashmir Srinagar. He even got married here and spent a life time serving the Radio and the Song & Drama division. A silent worker, he was the main tabla player in the orchestra for quite some time.

We missed Tufail Ali and remembered the day of his departure. He had become so emotional that he broke into tears and expressed his gratitude for the love and respect he had received from all of us. He even said that he would have settled here, had his family been with him. We were grateful to him for having discovered the gem of a *rabab* player like Sanaullah Butt, who was immediately employed by Radio Kashmir even before us.

Sanaullah Butt originally belonged to a group of *tomboories* (rabab players), with quite a few of them belonging to the village *Kreri* in District Baramullah. *Tamboories* were a group of half a dozen *rabab* players headed by a professional singer, usually well dressed and materially better off than his *rabab* players, who would move from place to place and perform in different festivals and marriage celebrations. Sanaullah Butt and his brother too, in the initial stages, had been part of such a group. These groups would travel to other places outside Kashmir in winter to earn a living. That is how Sanaullah had reached Peshawar and then Kabul, where he had stayed back to master his art. He used to say with pride that he had travelled even to Kabul to perform. The beautiful *rabab*,

inlaid with the finest of the mother of pearl chips, which he loved more than his life, had been purchased in Kabul.

I am reminded of an incident about this very instrument of his. Radio Kashmir had decided to purchase its own musical instruments after a few months of its inception. When a handsome offer was made to him by Radio Kashmir to sell his *rabab*, he agreed on the condition that nobody else should be allowed to play it except him. He, throughout his career would consider it not only his property but also love it as his own son. I remember how he would secure it near his pillow while retiring to sleep after the day's performance on various tours with us. He took child-like pleasure in provoking even renowned percussionists to beat him in his speed in different rhythm patterns. Another *rabab* player on staff was Mohammad Shaban Butt, a very silent musician.

Sanaullah's brother, who too was equally proficient, was a casual artist and did perform for some time. But unfortunately he died young. His son Ghulam Qadir too had learnt playing the *rabab* from both his father and his uncle Sanaullah. Though good at it, he could not be taken on staff as an extra *rabab* player, Mohammad Shaban Butt had already been appointed. Ghulam Qadir who was equally proficient in playing the Kashmiri *sarangi*, therefore, through the good offices of Sanaullah, got appointed as a staff artist and served the organization well till his retirement. Both these artists became prominent and valuable parts of the Radio Kashmir Orchestra along with the sitarists, Ghulam Ahmed and Prem Nath Chhatu. Sufiana maestro Mohammad Abdullah Tibetbaqal's *santoor* was always there to add to the orchestra to accompany the songs that were broadcast. Two more instruments were later on added to the orchestra. One was the *clarinet*, and the other the *sarangi*. It was probably Naseem Akhtar who initiated Nassrullah Khan, a gifted clarinet player, to try his luck in broadcasting as they both lived in the extended area of Magarbal Bagh that spread almost up to Batamaloo in Srinagar.

A very handsome young man at the time of joining the radio, Nassarullah Khan came from a family of artists who were members

of the Maharaja's colourful band. So, he had been raised in an atmosphere of music, He was bestowed with a God given gift of remarkable control over his breath and a feather touch to his fingers that created musical magic that would carry the listener to a different world. I had the pleasure of utilizing his creative genius whenever I needed to create an atmosphere of *pathos* or an *ambience* of spirituality in my drama productions. An extremely soft spoken person with refined manners Nassarullah had excellent *rapport* with his colleagues. As he grew with time and Radio Kashmir, his hidden talent of composing melodies for Kashmiri songs could not wait for long to bloom. The tunes he made and the melodies he weaved had the fragrance of our soil and touched our heart and we got immediately connected. That is why they became so popular that they became favourites of all the women who sang them in the musical nights at our marriages,. Who can forget the songs composed by him and sung by Shameem Dev, '*Aakho Shahre Sheerazo*' or '*Paertho gilasa kulni tal*' sung by Kailash Mehra? Though he never sang for the radio, he had a very soft and soothing voice to which I would love to listen while he would compose a song for my programmes. While recording the soundtrack of Nadim Sahib's classic opera *Vitasta* I kept on thinking on which notes I would build the finale that would keep the impact of the opera *lingering* in the minds of the audience while the lights faded and the curtain slowly came down. The last song was recorded as a *chhakri* with a very fast rhythm. I discussed it with Virender Mohan who had composed the music. And decided that from the very robust music there should emerge a solo instrument in *alap* in the third *octave* that could give the feel of *soaring* in time over the high peaks of mountains surrounding the lake Wullar where the legend about which the opera had been conceived. The choice finally fell on Nassarullah's clarinet. There used to be pin drop silence and the hall would then burst into thunderous applause when the auditorium lights would fade in. So it was Nassarullah's *alaap* that became the best *capping* for the classic opera *Vitasta* that I had directed for the Cultural Academy and whose music and soundtrack

was recorded and edited in the studios of Radio Kashmir Srinagar.

Though Nassarullah Khan, like Mohanlal Aima, is no more, his compositions have attained immortality. And when I feel nostalgic about those good old days of my life in theatre, I play the sound track of Vitasta and Nassarullah's ever smiling face comes up when his clarinet in the end brings a lump to my throat. He was happy and contented that his son Rehmatullah Khan was carrying forward his legacy.

Later on, the post of a *sarangi* player was created to meet the requirements of the large number of ghazal singers and *Ustads* of Indian classical music from different parts of the country who would come on our invitation to participate in our concerts. Altaf Hussain, a young talented *sarangi* player from Lucknow, was auditioned by the Central Audition Board in Delhi and appointed to this post. Altaf Hussain, an immaculately dressed young man, was too good in his art for his age. He was a poet but was too shy to recite his poems. Watching the magic of his fingers, Ghulam Qadir Butt, our Kashmiri *sarangi* player got interested in trying his hand at this wonderful bow instrument, which is considered to be the only musical instrument that has the flexibility to come closest to the human voice. Altaf Hussain, marking Ghulam Qadir's masterly handling of the Kashmiri *sarangi*, willingly began to teach him. Although learning even the basics like how to tune the *sarangi*, the role of the main strings and the supplementary strings etc. had deterred even the protégées of many *gharanas* Ghulam Qadir didn't lose patience and did pick up the basics. He however could not get qualified to accompany any classical music singer.

After spending more than a couple of years in Srinagar, Altaf Husain tried for a transfer, which he got and in his place an experienced *sarangi* player, Bhawani Prasad Mishra belonging to the *Benaras gharana* was posted at Radio Kashmir Srinagar. Older than Altaf Hussain, Bhawani Prasad Mishra was more proficient in his art. He also tried to keep pace with even the Kashmiri light music songs with quite a bit of success. Meanwhile, another *sarangi* player was engaged on casual basis. It was the elderly Kashmiri

classical singer Ved Lal Vakil. Though he contributed very little to our radio programmes, his colourful personality and his stories of eventful social life made interesting company. He belonged to a very respectable family of lawyers but seeing disparity around, he had become a rebel in his youth. He had very interesting personal experiences to narrate, which became the source of material for quite a few plays that I got written.

Because of the dictates of the then Central Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Dr. B. V. Keskar, a very orthodox propagator of Indian classical music, use of the harmonium in our music programmes was tabooed. In this move he had the moral support of veteran masters and a host of singers from his native Maharashtra. So, the importance of the *sarangi* as the most important instrument for accompaniment was emphasized upon. Nobody dared to flout this order. The reason put forward to ban the harmonium was that the harmonium is a western instrument and covered any blemish of a singer because of which the real merit of an artist could not be ascertained. But, surprisingly he had no objection to the use of the violin in Karnataka music without which it was considered incomplete. Or was it because the North did not have any power and control over the South? Thank God that such orthodox dictates are no more there in broadcasting. Now, the harmonium is used regularly in orchestras and even as an accompaniment, by classical singers. Harmonium players are felicitated like other musicians. Even a national programme of music on All India Radio was devoted to classical ragas on the harmonium and was relayed by every station of All India Radio. It was a great experience.

So, in this way, light music and its orchestration developed fast. New tunes were made, new melodies introduced, and new voices discovered. The credit goes to the composers who were all the time thinking of something new that would keep pace with the fast moving social milieu. The credit of becoming the first music composer must go to Mohanlal Aima. Although he was a Programme Assistant, basically an administrative job, he devoted

most of his time to the music studio. His forte was Kashmiri folk music. Gifted with a sweet voice, Aima, by which pet name his colleagues called him, was respected by all the musicians on staff not so much for his knowledge of music but for his jovial character. It won't go without saying that he is the pioneer who infused new life into our folk melodies. Assisted by Virender Mohan, he composed the music for Dinanath Nadim's opera *Bomber Yemberzal*. Its popularity was remarkable and its songs based mainly on our folk melodies, kept on resounding in the streets of Srinagar for a long time and when the music was recorded afresh by Radio Kashmir Srinagar, it reached every nook and corner of the valley. Some of its songs attained unmatched longevity. Who can forget the song Bombro Bomburo?

This song, had got embedded deep in the memory of veteran film producer Vidhu Vinod Chopra, a Kashmiri, who must have seen the opera staged in his childhood in Srinagar, in which one of his brothers Chitu Chopra, a dear friend of mine, was participating. It must have been that sweet nostalgia that made him introduce the refrain and melody of this song in his famous film 'Mission Kashmir' after so many decades. Or take the immortality of the Naati Sharif '*Ya Nabi Gosh Feryadan Thav*' which Aima had composed and sung. Besides introducing musical features on fixed themes he composed the music for a Hindi film, 'Pamposh' and two Kashmiri feature films, the first ever feature film 'Mainzraat' and the Kashmiri version of the bilingual film *Shair-e Kashmir Mehjoor*. His link with Radio Kashmir Srinagar snapped when he was transferred to All India Radio, Delhi. But even after that he would take pleasure in contributing to our music programmes whenever on a visit to Srinagar.

The next person to take charge of the baton was Virender Mohan. Virender Mohan was the grandson of a Dewan of Maharaja Pratap Singh whose father had been disowned by his father because he had married against his wishes, a rebellious act then. Living in Hari Singh High Street and having been brought up there had been a boon for him because next door lived Babu Kishen Das, a pioneer

of theatre craft in Kashmir. Babu Kishen Das was the father of the veteran Radio and Theatre Artist, Kedar Sharma, (Kari Shah). In fact Babuji, besides being the main driving force in organizing the annual festival of Ram Leela staged in Partap Bhawan in Amirakadal Chowk, now known as Lal Chowk, was a competent stage director. He had seen some talent in the neighborhood boy Virender and had therefore taken him under his patronage. It was because of his becoming part of Babu Kishen Das's theatre group that he got interested in music and became a flute player and a good one at that.

As Babu Kishen Das would be regularly requested by the principals of both S.P. College and Amar Singh College to help students in the production of the plays they intended to get staged, we considered him one of our *gurus*. It was because of this and the friendship with Kari Shah who too was a popular stage artist that Babu Kishen Das would ask us, the student actors, to act in his productions of 'Ram Leela'. It was there that I first met Virender Mohan, a young boy playing the role of Lav. And when not on stage, he would accompany music director Master Jaswant on the flute. It was because of this connection that Mohanlal Aima brought him to Radio Kashmir, first on a casual basis and then as a staff artist. Aima Sahib made him his assistant. One handicap of Mohanlal Aima was that he could not play the harmonium, on which music directors would normally compose tunes. So Virender Mohan had become a necessary anchor for him.

I saw his talent bloom when we were rehearsing Dina Nath Nadim's opera *Bombur Yaberzal*. The orchestral pieces, with which he decorated the lilting tunes that Aima composed, helped us in planning the choreography of the opera. And that was why we entrusted the music of the opera entirely to Virender Mohan, when I was commissioned by the state government to produce once again, '*Bombur Yamberzal*'. That was when the Russian delegation led by Marshall Bulganin, the Soviet Prime Minister and Nicolai Khrushchev, the Secretary General of the Communist Party of the U.S.S.R came on an official visit to Srinagar. The opera was

produced on a much larger scale than the earlier one. The performance was so impressive that the Soviet leaders, in whose itinerary only ten minutes were kept for witnessing the opera, after which there was to be a cocktail party followed by dinner, got so absorbed that they desired to stay till the end of the opera. So the tables were hastily laid on the sides of Neadou's Hotel Hall itself for cocktails, where we were staging the opera.

Through the passage of time, Virender Mohan rose in the hierarchy of the music department, first to the post of composer and then Supervisor of Music, in which capacity he worked till the time he was selected as a producer in Doordarshan, Srinagar. But this did not hamper in any way his passion for music. That was why, when the Jammu & Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture, And Languages motivated the great poet Dina Nath Nadim to write an opera on the legend of our great river *Vitasta*, on the initiative of Mohammad Yusuf Taing, then the Secretary of the Academy, Virender Mohan became the best choice for composing its music. For me, as the director of the opera, Virender Mohan was no stranger. He had worked with me not only in radio but also some of my stage productions. As such, I was sure of his talent. In addition to his talent, two other competent composers, Tej Kishen Jalali and Krishen Langoo were associated with him. And the result was that it became a landmark both in music and the stage-craft of Kashmir. The music, especially the orchestration, helped me build up a variety of situations and the atmosphere the script demanded.

After *Vitasta's* success I once again recommended Virender Mohan, to the Academy, when, after another musical, *Himala Ke Chashme* I was commissioned to direct the opera *Piya Baaj Pyala* (the love story of *Quli Qutub Shah* and *Bhagmati*) written in beautiful *Deccani Urdu* by Zubair Razvi. His beautiful music had taken support from some of the folk melodies of Andhra Pradesh. This opera too created history wherever it was staged. It became such a hit in Hyderabad that, the biggest theatre hall there proved too small for the surging crowds and led to the government there to request us to stage it in the open. As special light effects were

needed, absolute darkness was necessary to create the mystique of lighting. So we were reluctant to agree to their request. They promised that all our requirements would be met including darkness in the park. And they kept their promise and built a huge stage with a huge cyclorama in the very expansive Bagh-e-Aam of Hyderabad. We were amazed to see that the huge park would get filled to capacity much before the show's start. All the public lights in the area were switched off during the show that lasted for two hours. It was a sight! People with their portable tape recorders huddled around the giant speakers, keen to record the opera. The last I worked with Virender Mohan was for another opera for the Academy, *Tipu Sultan* based on the great warrior's life and martyrdom. The success of my production was to a great extent due to Virender Mohan and his associate Krishen Langoo's music.

The Department of Music was in turns headed by different programme officers at different times. Being generalists, it was not necessary that they should either be musicians or knowledgeable in music. But some of them did take interest in producing musical programmes. Of course, they would take help from the musicians on staff who would give shape to their ideas. Qaiser Qalandar tops the list of such programme officers. As he was doing research on the history of *Sufiana moosiqui*, he took a lot of interest in sitting with the musicians and got involved in their creativity. That is how he composed the music for Rehman Rahi's famous song '*Su Golab Roi Deoothum Beyi Az Golab Chavan*'. Even the credit of getting the Kashmiri song '*Lalas wontai chus sawal*' recorded by Asha Bhonsle in our studios, goes to him and the composer Virender Mohan and his dedicated instrumentalists.

The other Kashmiri song sung by Asha Bhonsle '*Ha Eshka Tchuro Rashka Kerthas Deevana Tai*' (music arranged by Nasarullah) was recorded by Bashir Butt when he was holding charge of the music section. He also contributed to enriching the programmes by making non-Kashmiri artists like Sarla Kapoor, Ajeet Kaur and others sing Kashmiri songs. That was the time, when there was a dearth of good women singers who would come

for a broadcast. Because of the popularity of the two remarkable songs sung by Asha Bhonsle, women artists, who would come to Kashmir to participate in the concerts, vied with each other to record a song in Kashmiri. Though we obliged, there were very few artists who could reach the benchmark set by Asha Bhonsle. After Asha Bhonsle it was Runa Laila, who rendered the popular Kashmiri song '*Katyū chookh nundabane wolo mashoka myane*' with almost perfect diction and pronunciation.

In fact she had been invited by the state government for a public concert, which was held in the Bakshi Sports Stadium under the banner of Jammu & Kashmir Academy. I still remember the day before the concert when Mohammad Yusuf Teng and I, along with Tej Kishen Jalali, and the musicians of Radio Kashmir were rehearsing with her in the drawing room of the Chief Minister's official residence. Her father requested that as she was not well she should not be allowed to walk down from the stage and go into the crowd which she normally did seeing the spontaneous response from the audience. Runa Laila promised her father that she would strictly adhere to his advice. But when she started singing the Kashmiri song the huge gathering of her fans in Bakhshi Stadium became so ecstatic that she too went into a trance and walked down the stage, singing with the huge crowd around listening to her, keeping rhythm by clapping and singing with her. Thank God nothing untoward happened! The song was so well sung that I, being the anchor, requested her to record it in our studios, to which she readily agreed. The recording was done on the same day in the afternoon, after which we recorded a long interview with her for the programme 'Mehfil' in our studio. This song too became equally popular. It is however regretted that we could not motivate Lata Mangeshkar to record a Kashmiri song for us. She had accepted our request but due to an abrupt change in the situation on the day of the recording, she couldn't.

Those were the days when the Emergency had been declared in the country. I was sitting with N. L. Chawla, the Station Director, in his room discussing a programme, when Lataji was ushered into

the room by Bashir Butt, who had gone to fetch her. It was his ever charming personality and his tact of motivating people to come and participate in our programmes that Shri N.L. Chawla had made Lataji, who was on holiday in Kashmir, agree to record an interview and if possible, a Kashmiri song too, in our studio. To which she had agreed. After the introductions were over, Lata Ji sat comfortably on the sofa. Coffee was brought in. The radio was on in the room as usual. While we were talking, the news from Delhi came over the radio in the room. Lataji asked Chawla Sahib to increase the volume a bit. Now all the attention got diverted to the radio. It was in that bulletin that the news came, that Kishore Kumar and all his songs had been banned over all the stations of All India Radio and Doordarshan with immediate effect. The news was shattering. We looked at Lataji. She closed her eyes and heaving a deep breath she exclaimed. "They have finished poor Kishore. This is very sad."

"What must have been the reason?" asked Chawla Sahib. "I knew something was brewing. Kishore had refused to sing in one of their concerts. That must be the reason. Whatever be the reason, it is bad for our industry," remarked Lata Mangeshkar. After listening to the news, Lataji's mood soured and she wanted to quickly record the interview and go. So, all our hopes of recording a Kashmiri song in her voice came apart. But even then, credit goes to Bashir Butt that he made her recite the first two lines of the popular song '*Kariyo manz jigras jaai, cham no maai masheani*'. These were just two lines of a song and every Kashmiri was quite familiar with the tune. Yet, their rendition in Lata Mangeshkar's voice was ethereal. But by narrating this memorable incident I am reminded of the dictatorial onslaught of the Emergency in almost every walk of our life. Even those singers and musicians who asked for a little freedom were not spared.

Coming back to the artists from outside the state, who would eagerly wait for an invitation from Radio Kashmir Srinagar, the ever smiling, ever dignified Begum Akhtar, was on top of the list. She would not miss a single occasion to respond. As my wife

Shanta Kaul would always present and anchor her concerts, Begum Akhtar had developed an affectionate bond with her. Though I was not directly concerned with the music section, it was because of Shanta's bonding with Begum Akhtar that I too had the good fortune of spending some time with her when she would invite Shanta for a cup of tea. She had a subtle but terrific sense of humour. She had a huge repertoire of personal experiences to narrate when she was in a mood to do so.

Once, talking about the varied responses she would elicit from her audience, she narrated the reaction of a gentleman sitting in the front row. "This happened in Delhi. He must have been understandingly an important person, because he was sitting in the front row. This man had come dressed in the traditional *sherwani* which people wear while attending a 'mushaiara'. I was singing Faiz Ahmad Faiz's ghazal '*Gulon me rang bhare baad-e-nao bahar chale, Chale bhi aao ki gulshan ka karobaar chale*'. This gentle man, after every '*sher*', displayed a rather loud display of appreciation, to which I did once or twice respond with an '*adaab*'. This probably encouraged him to come on stage when the concert was over and came to me. He first showered all the praises that were left in his store and then asked inquisitively, "Begum Sahiba please tell me, *Yeh Gulshan Sahib kis cheez ka karobaar karte hain?*" I looked at him holding my laughter back, and said, "*Tel bechthey hain becharey!*"

In another concert of Begum Akhtar that was held in the small hall in the first floor of our Polo Ground studios which I was conducting, there was loud applause after every couplet to which she kept on responding with her usual smile. After a couple of such responses she bent a little to my side, and whispered, '*Mere gaaney ki nahin, sher ko daad de rahen hain.*' Exclaimed with a smile, looking at the instrumentalists who were completing the link music "*Subhan Allah!*" and continued.

On another occasion, after finishing her recording, Begum Sahiba came to the Duty Room to relax. The great Dogri folk singer Mast Ram's pre-recorded song which was being aired could be

heard on the Duty Room speaker and it drew Begum Akhtar's attention. She closed her eyes for a little while and then exclaimed aloud "*Wah! Subhan Allah! Raag Pahari ki asli rooh to yeh hai. Hum kya raag Pahari gatey hain!*" That was her honesty, a sincere self assessment, a tribute to the folk music, mother of many ragas in classical music.

As already mentioned, Begum Akhtar had a great sense of humour. Here is another example. Her recording that she had done during the day was to be broadcast the same evening. When the recording was on air, she rang up the Duty Room and said to the Duty Officer Ali Mohammad, "*Duty afsar Sahib, mana ki main bahut wajbi ga leti hoon lekin itni besuri bhi to nahi hoon. Lilah raham kijiye aur ise band kijiye!*" Ali Mohammad, who was one of our best duty officers, got confused and rushed to the studio. The engineer on duty was already there and along with the announcer Jalal Geelani was trying to change the tape to the other playback deck as the first one was losing speed. An apology was made to the listeners and the broadcast resumed. When next day this incident, that had been recorded in the daily report by the Duty Officer, was read in the programme meeting it was an embarrassment for everyone present. P.C. Chatterjee, who was the then station director, immediately rang up Begum Akhtar and offered an apology after which he issued a warning to the staff responsible for the maintenance of the equipment.

Begum Akhtar was the greatest amongst the *ghazal* and light classical music singers about whom one of the famous music critics of The Times of India 'Vigilante', in his column once paid tribute by describing her as 'the lady with a heart throb in her voice, a voice that would set a listener's heart aflutter.' If any instrumentalist played a wrong note, she would not get perturbed but would look at him with a smile. Because her own *sur* was so pure and perfect, nothing could disturb her singing.

While writing about her being so large-hearted, I am reminded of another great artist who had come to participate in our programme. He was the great classical maestro Ustad Nisar Hussain

Khan, whom nobody could beat in the rendering of the '*tarana*.' That was the time when programmes were broadcast live. We had assembled in the spacious music studio of our Polo ground to listen to the great *Ustad*. When after the *alaap* of *raag Darbari* he was through the *Khayal* he abruptly stopped and turned to Ghulam Qadir, who had just learnt playing on the regular *sarangi* and burst out on him and shouted "*Bajao Bajao! Tum hi bajao!*" Just imagine, it all got broadcast! Poor Ghulam Qadir was stunned. His fault was only that he had tried to add a couple of notes on his newly learnt *sarangi*. Fretting and fuming Khan Sahib continued when he was made aware that it was a live broadcast. That was the difference. Begum Akhtar would never have lost her temper like that.

Another event comes to my mind while writing about what a magnificent person Begum Akhtar was. My dear friend, Bashir Butt and I were transferred along with Ali Mohammad Lone in the end of 1957 from Srinagar. The only crime that we had committed was that we were staunch followers of Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq, who had parted ways with Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad and had formed his separate political party, Democratic National Conference. Bashir Butt's sin was that he had in our programme meetings objected to the interference of Bakhshi Sahib's stooges in our programmes. He and I were sent to All India Radio Jalandhar and Ali Mohammad Lone to All India Radio, Delhi. The ploy given to the Director General of All India Radio by some Kashmiri officers who had become a party to this dirty game was that the daily programme, *Sada-e- Watan*, which had been started by All India Radio, Jalandhar to counter Pakistan Radio's propaganda, had to be, as politically required, suitably augmented. As the two of us had ample experience in producing such programmes we were to be sent there. A similar reason was given in case for Ali Mohammad Lone's transfer to the Kashmiri section of All India Radio in Delhi. This background was necessary to continue with, while speaking about Begum Akhtar. So, now, back to Jalandhar!

Chandigarh, in spite of having become the capital of the Punjab,

did not have a Radio Station during that period. But All India Radio had built a recording studio there, where talks, discussions and the music programmes could be recorded for broadcast from the Jullundur studios. Even some concerts and *mushairas* were organized there. Under this schedule, an exclusive concert of Begum Akhtar was planned there, for which the then Chief Minister of the Punjab, Sardar Partap Singh Kairon was invited to be the Chief Guest. But in all the enthusiasm it had been overlooked that the day of the concert coincided with the festival of Eid. Invitations had already been despatched from Jalandhar. So, the Station Director D. K. Sengupta was shattered as Begum Akhtar had informed him that she may not be able to make it as it would be Eid that day. She was a good friend of D. K. Sengupta, and he pleaded that all the invitations had been distributed and the Chief Minister, no less a person than Sardar Partap Singh Kairon, had agreed to be the chief guest. He begged "Begum Sahiba, all of us will be in a soup." Sengupta, the music producer, Bhattacharya, Bashir Butt and I, sitting in Sengupta's room, were waiting with bated breath. When Sengupta finally uttered the words, "Thank you, thank you so much!" we too heaved a sigh of relief, and got set to travel to Chandigarh.

Begum Akhtar arrived there on the day of Arfa (the day before Eid). When she saw Bashir Butt and I had come there to receive her at the railway station, she was surprised. And when she came to know that we had been transferred there, she exclaimed, "*Hai Allah kya ghazab kiya inhoney, Jannat se nikaal ke is tandoor mein jhonk diya!*" Punjab was under the grip of a horrible heat wave at that time, and it was really a furnace. Bashir replied, "*Hukmi Hakim, Margi Mafajat Begum Sahiba.*" She felt really sorry for us. But when I look back, I think it was a blessing in disguise for this transfer had brought us, two school friends closer. It was great fun to live together under one roof. Besides, had we not been there, how could we have had the occasion of spending some time with that remarkable lady, staying in the same Guest House in Chandigarh?

The next day there was rejoicing for everyone. The station Director, D.K.S N Gupta came with flowers to offer his greetings to Begum Akhtar early that morning. He came to our room too to greet Bashir on that auspicious day. After he left we had our breakfast together with Begum Sahiba, after which we proceeded to the hall for rehearsals. We could feel that Begum Sahiba had suddenly become sad and forlorn. So were we both. Like her, we too were away from our families.

In the evening the entire hall got emotionally charged when she began a *thumri* with the refrain, "*Aaj Hamari Eid Kahan.*" The notes of the *thumri* that she had rehearsed in the morning were different. The change in the refrain was a spontaneous pouring out of her inner feelings. I am an ardent fan of Begum Akhtar and have a very good collection of her music. But I have never found such pathos, such wails of separation which she poured out in that *thumri* '*Aaj Hamari Eid Kahan*' in that memorable concert at Chandigarh, anywhere else.

When we reached the Guest House after the concert, Begum Akhtar looked relaxed and asked us to get refreshed. "*Bus ab tazadam ho jaiye, uske baad baith ke Eid manayenge!*" So, after freshening up we assembled in the cosy lobby of the Guest House. A couple of artists who had come with us from Jalandhar were there. Begum Akhtar was now that ever smiling, ever affectionate person again. She called for the harmonium and the *dholak* and asked the artists present to sing and warm up the *mehfil*. There was a male ghazal singer keen to sing in her presence. He was very proud that he could sing up to the upper most note of the third octave. So he tried to impress Begum Sahiba with this achievement of his. The always encouraging Begum Akhtar showered her praises on him. And when he finished, Begum Sahiba turned to us and said, "*Mujhe to inke andaz se apne ustad ka ek vaqia yaad aaya. Unke ek shagird taan lagate waqt eadi choti ka zor lagaker teep par jaane se baaz nahin aate thhe. Ek baar jab woh aise he teep par tika raha to ustad ne daant kar kaha, 'are miyaan ab neeche uttar kar to dikha'. Sabhi ne zor ka thahaka maaraa.*" Then, turning

to the singer, she again said, "*Wah! bahut hee khoob.*" In fact, she wanted to give her honest opinion on this ghazal singer's singing. Because when he would come down to the first octave, his breath would break and he would get exhausted. It seemed that the artist had understood what she meant because, after a little while, he excused himself and left. He later on told us that he had not felt bad about what Begum Sahiba had said. "It was a guru *Diksha* and I shall always remember that."

Begum Akhtar ordered special dinner for all of us and felt as if she was with her own family. After dinner, she led us back to the lobby and the *mehfil* of music, jokes, and anecdotes continued till almost midnight. Those days the film song '*Reshmi Shalwaar, Kurta Jaali Ka*' was exceedingly popular. Begum Akhtar pulled the *dholak* to her side and playing on it sang this popular song and like a small girl laughed and giggled while singing it. Well that was the real artist in her. The reader must be feeling that I have devoted so much space to Begum Akhtar. But since such stars are seldom born and one has seldom the opportunity of seeing them at close quarters, space is never enough to dedicate it to them.

Back to Radio Kashmir Srinagar: As said earlier, every artist, every writer, every poet worth the name from other parts of the country craved visiting Kashmir. As such he or she waited eagerly for an invitation from Radio Kashmir to participate in its concerts and '*mushairas*'. That way we were lucky to have had a galaxy of great masters participating in our programmes from time to time and gave us occasion to record them, talk to them and benefit from their knowledge. From amongst them the graceful visage of Ustad Bismillah Khan comes to my mind after Begum Akhtar. When he entered our studio, we were overawed by his towering personality. Tall, handsome, with a fair dazzling complexion and a permanent smile on his face, this greatest of all the *shehnai* maestros, had a magnetic aura around him. For me it was a dream come true. I could not imagine that I would not only see him but even record an interview with him. I remembered that there were only two musicians to perform at the dawn of our Independence Day, to

herald a new era. One was Pundit Onkarnath Thakur about whom it was said, that he had, provided the healing power of Indian classical music to the Italian dictator Mussolini, by lulling him to sleep through his melodious voice. The other artist was the great Ustad Bismillah Khan, whose recorded *shehnai* would later on be played, the first thing in the morning, from every station of All India Radio including Radio Kashmir Srinagar.

Bismillah Khan Sahib had a *duggi* (the percussion instrument) player, Shyam Prashad his lifetime friend accompanying him on this percussion instrument. During the interview I had with him, I found that he was a great supporter of the progressive movement of the artists born out of the freedom struggle. This encouraged me and my dear friend Ali Mohammad Lone to invite him to meet Kashmiri writers and artists'. He readily agreed and was very happy at the idea.

After the disbanding of The National Cultural Front, its members had organised themselves into, first the National Cultural Congress, and then the National Cultural Conference. Lone and I had remained active members of these organisations throughout. So a get-together was arranged at the office of the National Cultural Conference which was in the dingy attics of a building on the Residency Road next to the then Orion Hotel. Being a poor artists and writers' office it had one small desk type box to keep papers. Luckily, we had changed the worn out grass mats with a few new *wagwoos* (mats woven with the weeds of the lake). All the prominent members like Rehman Rahi, Somnath Zutshi, Abdul Aziz Haroon, Noor Mohammad Roshan Mohammad Amin Kamil and others had assembled there. To be very frank we had the apprehension that Khan Sahib, who had been felicitated by *rajahs* and *maharajas* in their palaces, might feel insulted to have been invited to such a small and lowly place. But to our pleasant surprise, he felt at home and soon became one of us and took keen interest in our activities. And when we requested him to bestow honour to this event by leaving behind the ethereal notes of his *shehnai* he readily agreed. He was in the best of moods and played for quite some time and

gave a break only when the few snacks that we had ordered from the Orion Hotel were brought in. A *dasterkhwaan* was spread and Kashmiri '*girdas*' and *seekh kebabs* were served. He, his two sons who were accompanying him enjoyed the *naans* and the *kababs* but the *duggi* player Pundit Shyam Prasad moved aside and when we requested him to join, Bismillah Khan spoke for him and said, "He is a vegetarian. He will not take anything till he does not wind up. After that he will first take a bath and do his *pooja* and then only sit to eat. Look at our friendship. He is a *pucca* Brahman and I a *Nimaz Guzzar* Muslim. But when we start to perform, our religions gets merged and become one. That is the reality. Music alone has that strength." Abdul Aziz the admirable driver of Radio Kashmir then came to drive Khan Sahib to the guest house where he was staying. But Bismillah Khan Sahib told him to wait. He was so happy to be with us and even expressed it. He then narrated his experiences. It was in that meeting that he narrated how the temples in Benaras invite him to play on important events and how he leads the Moharram processions playing on his '*shehnai*.'

This memorable Mehfil with that great Ustad was again due to Radio Kashmir. If it may not be out of place, I must mention another meeting with him, and that, after a gap of nearly half a century and that too in Srinagar and again through Radio Kashmir Srinagar. The tide of time had passed, wrapping with it many a youth, many an event and many a turbulence. Ustad Bismillah Khan had attained unimaginable heights culminating in the greatest National Award, the Bharat Ratna by then. But time had taken toll of his health. I was back home to Srinagar on a yearly visit, but had not yet been to the Radio Station, which I always considered my second home. One morning G. H. Zia, our Gojri producer who was presently the Station Director, rang me up and informed me that Bismillah Khan was in town and wanted me to interview him. I was thrilled. He told me that the state Academy had booked him for a concert to be held in Tagore Hall and that was the reason he was there. So, the two of us and the recording engineer, Handoo went to the Circuit House where Khan Sahib and his party were staying. We were

escorted to his bedroom. During all the years that had passed by since I had recorded him last, my hair had turned grey but Bismillah Khan was now only a shadow of himself. He was very happy that some people from the Radio Station had come to interview him. But I was shocked to see him sitting on his bed helplessly supported by a heap of cushions. Though hard of hearing now, he was as vocal as ever. When I asked him how he felt after having been awarded the coveted Bharat Ratna, he started talking of his youth and the good old days. Probably he had not heard my question. While talking to him I found that he was mentally adequately alert and when I reminded him that we had had a small exclusive *mehfil* with him, nearly fifty years ago he had visited Kashmir, he immediately said "In that small room where writers and artists had gathered? Yes, I remember. It was very satisfying. Ah! Those good old days!"

The Bharata Ratna had apparently not affected him much. Bismillah Khan's son, sitting nearby, now managed his affairs and lamented that in spite of a very glorious career and great contribution, they lived in virtual penury as his father had never cared for money. He wanted that his illustrious father be materially helped so that he could be made as comfortable as possible in his old age. By this time his second son came to inform him that he was getting late for the preparation for the evenings concert. So the interview had to be wound up.

In the evening, Tagore Hall was jam packed. But everyone was shocked, especially those who had seen him in his youth, when he was brought on to the stage in a wheeled chair. The concert started with a short shehnai recital by his younger son. And when the grand master started playing, the magic in his shehnai wasn't there. His breath would not co-operate with him. He however carried himself through the concert and the audience stayed on till the last thereby paying homage to his glorious past.

The other great musicians who graced our programmes and whom I remember were Ustad Nissar Hussain Khan, the great master of Tarana *gayeeeki*, Pundit Ganga Prashad Pathak of Gwalior,

a great performer with a sonorous voice, the brothers-duo Rajan and Sajan Mishra, Shanti Hiranand, Anjali Bannerji, Parveen Sultana, the Bharat Ratna Pundit Ravi Shanker, Sitarists Ustad Mushtaq Ali, Nikhil Bannerji, Ustad Vilayat Khan, Sarod player Sharan Rani Mathur, and a host of such luminaries. It was indeed great luck that I had watched them perform and had the chance to interact with them. I am not sure if their recordings are still there in the archives of Radio Kashmir Srinagar.

I shall fail in my duty over here if I do not record the contribution that the music supervisors and younger composers made to infuse new life into our musical presentations. From amongst the supervisors the first name that comes to my mind is Jhande Khan, a classical vocalist. I vividly remember him. A lean elderly person, wearing a tweed coat over a typical Punjabi *shalwar* and a white muslin turban with a long tail, which he gradually got rid of, probably to keep harmony with our *Sufiana* artists' attire. He belonged to the *Mirasi* clan, who were proud that they used to be on the Maharajas' staff to entertain them with their jokes, pranks and singing. He was the earliest recruit in Radio Kashmir and had been transferred from Jammu to Srinagar. When he was introduced to me for the first time as Ustad Jhande Khan I mistook him for the doyen of Indian Classical Music Ustad Jhande Khan, who had challenged that he would compose all the twelve songs of the classic feature film, 'Chitrlekha' directed by the veteran Kedar Sharma which would be distinctly different from one another in Raag Bhairvi, a feat no other music director had dared do after him. That impression did not last long. This, our Jhande Khan, did broadcast for a few months. But because of the quality of his voice he was taken off the mike and assigned the job of getting all the musical instruments we had tuned before the start of every transmission. The credit of training the artists how to coordinate with the *tanpura* which kept singers in tune, goes to him. That was his contribution to our music, but we liked him for his humour and the anecdotes he would narrate about the Royal Court especially that of Maharaja Pratap Singh. As the accounts pertaining to the

old royal courts go, the *Mirasis* and the court jesters only had the privilege of being informal at times with the Maharajas. Jhande Khan belonged to that class. He once narrated an event of a cricket match between a team from England and Maharaja Pratap Singh's Eleven of which the Maharaja was himself the captain.

As is well known, Maharaja Partap Singh was short and to give himself a taller look, he would don a big turban and tie it with an upward twist to look taller. As the team had a Maharaja as its captain, orders were placed much before the match in England for special leg guards, gloves, and boots etc. for him. This special order in fact was placed because of his height. Jhande Khan narrated this like a *dastango* (the traditional story teller) loaded with a *mirasi's* flavour. He continued and told us what had happened on the day of the match. "His Highness's team was to play first. A huge crowd of his *wazirs*, *darbaris*, prominent citizens and the ladies of the English team were seated according to their rank in the pavilion. The State Band was in attendance. As The Maharaja Bahadur rose to proceed to the playground, the band played a marching tune and with a flourish His Highness walked to the side from where he had to start, followed by an attendant in uniform, carrying the maharaja's bat. You should have seen the resounding applause and rejoicing. Then the match commenced. The ball came and the Maharaja hit it. It went to his right. We thought that the English player who bent to catch it would stop it but he fumbled and pushed the ball to reach the boundary line. Another flourish of applause. The runner, who was ready by the Maharaja's side, ran to take the runs. Another ball and another hit and in the same way it crossed the boundary line. The game went on like that and the Maharaja Bahadur made a century in no time. The final result was that His Highness's team won the match. There was a big dinner party in the evening. But the Maharaja, after remaining there for a little while retired to his private chambers."

We were listening to Jhande Khan with rapt attention. He continued. "After his usual simple vegetarian dinner Maharaja Bahadur called the close circle of his courtiers and the *Mirasis* to

chat and relax. During reviewing that day's cricket match, one of the courtiers around, who alone, being close to the Maharaja, could take some liberty, said "If the life of this servant of your Excellency is spared he shall state the real fact of the day". "Go on. This measly life of yours is spared. Come on state this fact of yours." The man bent forward and said, "Your Highness! Those cunning *Firangis* were not stopping the ball when your blessed bat was hitting it, but kept pushing it to cross the boundary line." Maharaja Bahadur looked at him, laughed and said, "You fool, do you think that we were not watching it? We watched every prank of theirs, and were amused." "Then Your Highness should have hauled them up." "*Bewaqaof! Woh bandar khhush ho rahey thhey ki woh hamein raajneeti kay maidaan men bhi isi tarah bahlaakar apnaa ulloo seedha kar sakengay. Bewaqaof! Banderon ki aulad!*" (Those monkeys must have been rejoicing that they would play similar pranks at the table of political negotiation too, flatter us and manage to get their leverage.) That was the alertness of our Maharaja Bahadur." Jhande Khan was a storehouse of such stories, jokes and anecdotes of the erstwhile royalty. Being interested to know our past I came across this story of Maharaja Pratap Singh's cricket team and the match Jhande Khan had narrated in the state gazettes too. Whether Jhande Khan was actually an eyewitness to the stories he narrated could not be ascertained. However he narrated them with so much vigour that one felt he might really have been present there.

Another supervisor of music was one of the best classical singers of Jammu, Pundit Uma Dutt Sharma, father and guru of the santoor maestro Pundit Shiv Kumar Sharma. Pundit Uma Dutt Sharma was the guru of the then Sadr-i- Riyaasat of Jammu and Kashmir, Dr. Karan Singh, who took keen interest in Indian classical music. So, when government offices moved to the summer capital, Srinagar, from Jammu, Dr. Karan Singh had to enforce a gap of six months to his training in music. This made him uneasy. So he used his good offices at the Directorate of All India Radio at Delhi and got Pundit Uma Dutt Sharma's job too made migratory. This continued

for a few years. Coming to Srinagar for six months in a year, proved a double blessing for Uma Dutt Ji. As music supervisor he had a lot of spare time that he would spend sitting with the sufiana ustaads, Tibetbaqal and Qalinbaft keenly watching them tuning and playing the hundred stringed instrument *santoor*. He, being very sharp, picked up the basics of this instrument and must have thought that this instrument had the potential of getting introduced to Indian classical music too. I remember Pandit Shiv-kumar Sharma as a student then, doing his Master's in Kashmir University. I remember having heard him play on the tabla, even the violin, in a concert during the Jammu & Kashmiri Writers and Artists festival held in Jammu in 1954. He was good at playing both these instruments. We were told in Jammu that he had even accompanied Pundit Ravi Shankar on the tabla when he had visited that city. But his father Uma Dutt Ji must have thought that there were dozens of good tabla players in the country and if his son was to take up music as his profession and become a tabla player, he would be just one of them. That basically must have been the reason why Uma Dutt Ji wanted him to work on the santoor. He had, while in Srinagar, even got a *santoor* made by the *Zazs* the master craftsmen producing Kashmiri musical instruments, especially the *santoor*. Thus Pundit Uma Dutt Ji initiated his son to take up this beautiful instrument and tune it as per the temperament of Indian classical music. That is how his very talented son Shiv Kumar got initiated to master this instrument and introduced it to the rest of the world. The rest is history.

It was due to the blessings of goddess Saraswati that Pundit Uma Dutt Sharma got the opportunity to serve Radio Kashmir Srinagar. Had that not happened, the *santoor* would have remained confined to Sufiana Kalam and to Kashmir. The entire music world is now acquainted with the potential of the santoor, both for solo performances as well as being an important part of an orchestra. Credit for introducing this musical instrument to the world goes to Santoor Maestro Pundit Shiv Kumar Sharma, and Pundit Uma Dutt Sharma but Radio Kashmir Srinagar too played a pivotal role in

increasing its fame.

Time moved on and with that, changes and innovations kept getting introduced to accept new challenges. Younger talent started pouring in. New composers and singers came up to bring freshness in our programmes. Radio moved out from the walls of the studios. Live concerts were conducted in different auditoriums of the valley. Simultaneous broadcasts were possible because of ever developing technical facilities. Popular announcers got groomed to become presentation announcers, whom I would call the forerunners of the modern D.Js. For these concerts there was a great demand for invitations. These concerts gave composers the opportunity to conduct their orchestra and the singers to perform live. I must make a mention of the very successful composers here who were good conductors too. On top of the list is the santoor maestro Bhajan Sopori. Like Pundit Shiv Kumar Sharma, he too was initiated into music by his father, Pundit Shambhoo Nath Sopori, the sitarist and guru of many musicians and singers like Shameem Dev Kailash Mehra, Omkar Nath Raina and many others.

I knew Bhajan ji as a student of Kashmir University. As far as I remember, he too was doing his Master's in English. I had heard his *santoor* in a couple of university functions and was greatly impressed by him. That was in my mind when we had completed the shooting of the film 'Shair-e-Kashmir Mehjoor' and had decided that we should give a Kashmiri flavour to its background music that could be used for both versions of the film. The songs had been recorded by Prem Dhawan for the Hindi version and by Mohanlal Aima for the Kashmiri version. So I suggested to Prabhat Mukherjee, who was the director of the Hindi version and the producer, while I was directing the Kashmiri version, that we should use the *santoor* as the main instrument for the background music. He thought that I was suggesting that we should contact Shiv Kumar Sharma who was in Mumbai. He brushed the idea aside saying that Shivji was a very busy artist and would be beyond our means. I told him that I was not suggesting Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma but a young *santoor* player of Kashmir, Bhajan Sopori. He agreed to

give Bhajan a trial. We found that this young musician was quick and sharp to understand what we wanted from him. It was because of this quality that we used his *santoor* throughout the film to lay the mood of different sequences. The effect was indeed impressive.

That was my first experience of working with Bhajan Sopori. I knew his father Pandit Shambhu Nath Sopori very well and that too for many years and had always been overwhelmed by his talent and humility. I found the same sophistication and humility in his son, traits that are so important in an artist. As is commonly believed, every move is governed by destiny. So it was destined that Bhajan Sopori who was studying for his Master's Degree and preparing for an opening somewhere, like his elder brother, should become a professional musician. I would give credit to that moment when the thought of roping him in for the film 'Shair-e- Kashmir Mehjoor' came up.

I had experienced in Bombay as well as in Kolkatta where we were shooting the indoors and later on editing the film that, like Bengal and other areas, we too had very rich folk music and lilting tunes, which required innovative projection. It should not be attributed to parochialism if I say that we have a variety of rhythm patterns in our folk music as the Africans have. It will not be a boast. It only needed composers with proper knowledge of music to exploit them. And we in Radio Kashmir Srinagar had hardly any. After Mohanlal Aima's moving out from Srinagar, the music section was working on almost ad-hoc basis. So, Station Director Amritlal Maini's consistent efforts led to the post of a Music Producer being sanctioned.

The question was of finding a competent Kashmiri musician with the required academic qualifications as well as sufficient knowledge of music. This was a big problem. Some names came up. But none of them had both the requisite qualifications. Bhajan Sopori's name was uppermost in my mind. But, after completing his Master's degree, he had left for the USA where his brother was settled and had joined some music institute there to learn Western music notations and composing. He however had been motivated

to apply here too by his father. I had made Maini Sahib listen to some of the recordings we had done for the Film 'Mehjoor'. He too was impressed. The dates for the interview had been fixed and conveyed to the Director General, but Bhajan did not want to leave his course in the USA half-way. So I felt so sorry, not so much for him, but for the chance we had almost got to have a really talented Music Producer. We felt helpless. We were afraid that since we were not getting a competent person in Kashmir, the Directorate may send somebody from Delhi or Lucknow and that would not serve our purpose. Finally, it was decided that Maini Sahib should write to the Director General explaining the position and request him to allow us to extend the date of the interview. The Director General understood our sincerity of purpose and agreed to the proposal. It was after a second extension that Bhajan Sopori arrived and got interviewed and was appointed. And now everybody knows how valuable his contribution was and to what heights he rose in his career as a musician.

Along with the post of a Producer for Music in Radio Kashmir Srinagar, a couple of posts for music composers too were sanctioned. The first Kashmiri music composer appointed was Nasrullah Khan, about whose talent I have already written earlier in detail. Besides him, the very popular singer Ghulam Nabi Sheikh was also recruited after a tough competition. He was a genuine artist, and greatly influenced by the veteran Ghulam Hassan Sofi. He did not hesitate in confessing that Sofi was his real guru. His voice had the pathos that most suited the rendering of the love lyrics of separation and longing. Even his rendering of the poetry of our Sufi poets had a passionate yearning to be one with the Lord. After Bhajan Sopori's moving to Delhi, Ghulam Nabi Sheikh replaced him and became Head of the Music Section. He would have gone great guns but God took him away from us in the prime of his youth. While travelling to Delhi in a train along with his daughter who was going for an interview, he was pushed out from the running train by some unknown hooligans. His death is still a mystery and a horrible tragedy. His body was found at quite a

distance from some station after quite some time. And the police had cremated it as an unclaimed body. This was a shattering example of the police callousness in our country. This tragedy shook all of us. Though by that time I had retired from Radio Kashmir, it was a personal loss for me for I had developed a special love for him and his talent.

While writing now about him, his ever soft, ever smiling face has come up and I feel that his soul still longs for justice. A commendable quality about him was that he was imparting the best of available education to his children. I came across his brilliant son in Amar Singh College where I had once gone to give a lecture about the role of mass media in our society. This was after his father's death. I was greatly impressed to listen to a handsome boy with excellent diction in both English and Urdu. I was thrilled to know from the Principal of the college that he was Ghulam Nabi Sheikh's son. I met Ghulam Nabi Sheikh's wife and his very cultured and graceful mother-in-law too, when they came to my house along with his son on my wife Shantaji's request to have a cup of tea with us. I was amazed at their determination to fulfill the departed soul's dream about his children. I have been enquiring about them and am happy that they are doing well. But their wounds haven't and cannot be healed. That is how destiny plucked a bud before it fully bloomed.

Another cultured and by nature, silent, composer, who contributed a lot by reintroducing lilting melodies of the past and reviving them to suit modern sensibilities, was the very unassuming Mohammed Ashraf. Though I did not have occasion to work with him or use his talent in my radio and stage productions, I was mesmerized by his compositions. Well known singers like Vijay Malla, and Kailash Mehra rated him much above many a new composer. He will always remain a prominent part of the history of broadcasting in Kashmir whose final call came when he was conducting his composition on stage in a concert organised by Radio Kashmir in Tagore Hall. After a little while he suddenly collapsed while performing after suffering a massive heart attack. This again

was a great loss to Kashmir. Men come and go. But when an artist, a writer, a musician goes off the scene, his place can hardly be filled.

From amongst the guest composers whom Radio Kashmir Srinagar, invited from time to time for some special programmes, Krishen Langoo stands out, as he was the most talented amongst them. He had an innovative capability of making his compositions fully drenched in the immortal melodies of our past. I remember the time, when I planned a biographical programme "Gashi Tarakh" on old masters of our Sufi poetry the name of Krishen Langoo came immediately to my mind, since he could set the exalted poetry of these mystics to music without the flamboyance of modern orchestration. This was essential, because the lyrics here were more important than the accompanying music. As far as the scripting was concerned, there could have been no other person better than the well known scholar, writer and critic Mohammad Yusuf Teng. And as had been my endeavour, to associate the writers of my programmes in the initial stages of production, so that there were no lacunae left in projecting what they wanted to convey. In that process, I conveyed to Mr. Taing that I had commissioned Krishen Langoo for the project. He too was convinced that Krishan Langoo would certainly do a good job. The result was that we were, in this way, able to produce more than a dozen bio-documentaries on our great *Sufi* poets, who in fact, are the real representatives of Kashmiriat. This was because the music was commensurate with the essence of the verses. The most challenging task was to get the poetry of Roop Bhawani set to music. Some critics may not agree, but I have no hesitation in saying that Roop Bhawani was the first poet who broke the barriers of the grammar of the classical traditions in poetry and was the harbinger of modernism in our literature. It goes to the credit of Krishen Langoo's compositions and Aarti Tikoo and Ghulam Hasan Sofi's sweet voices, that the essence of Roop Bhawani's poetry, though difficult to understand because of the language of her time, reached the common listener. I had got all those recordings preserved in the archives of Radio Kashmir

Srinagar and hope they are still there. I might sound a little biased as far as Krishen Langoo is concerned. But I just cannot help it, for he has been working with me for the last thirty years, be it in radio, stage, films or television. He still is. Our last co-operation was in Mir Hasan's classic, 'Masnavi Sehrul Bayan' for the Urdu Service of Doordarshan.

I left radio in 1985 and moved to films and television and since then have been most of the time busy in Mumbai. But my soul, my roots were there in the land of my ancestors. I have been taking time off from Mumbai, to go regularly to my home in Srinagar. And while in Srinagar, my obsession is to listen to Radio Kashmir Srinagar. I feel happy that the younger generation of broadcasters is carrying forward the traditions that Radio Kashmir Srinagar had created to become the real voice of the people for more than sixty years. And whenever I go there to meet old and new friends, I always feel it to be a homecoming.

I wind up this important segment of broadcasting with a 'resume' of one of the most important contributions Radio Kashmir Srinagar has made to develop modernity in our musical presentations. It introduced the genre of musical features on different themes, like the cycle of seasons, the advent of spring, an ode to autumn, and different and bashful moods of our lakes. This was followed by radio adaptations of some of our *Masnavis* Like *Gulrez*, *Akka Nandun*, *Saen Kiser*, *Bombur ta Lolarey* etc. which finally gave birth to our operas like *Bombur Yamberzal*, *Heemal Nagrai*, *Vitasta*, *Shihil Kul*, *Bombur Ta Lolarey* etc.. All of them were first broadcast over the radio before being enacted. The pioneer in introducing musical features was Noor Mohammad Roshan. His poetry in the musical *Baharo Aash Cham Cheini* was of lasting and intransient value. Later, other well known poets like Dina Nath Nadim, Rehman Rahi, Amin Kamil, Ghulam Nabi Khayal, Muzzafar Aazim, and Ghulam Nabi Firaq added commendably to this genre.

Time has proved that this land is as remarkable in the field of art and literature as it is in its spectacular beauty and values of humanity. The ancient myth that music was born in Bengal and

breathed its last in Kashmir has been shattered by the long chain of composers, musicians and singers, whose talent has not remained confined to the mountains surrounding the valley, but has reached different parts of our country, carrying the fragrance of our music to countries like China, Japan, Tashkent in Asia and France, Italy, the U.K., in Europe and the U.S.A. Certainly not a small feat!



DRAMA, DOCUMENTARIES AND FEATURES.

Though music, as the Kashmiris say, is a tonic for spiritual emancipation, the most effective medium to reflect the struggle of humanity to get itself freed from the shackles of bondage, in which it is entangled by destiny and the vagaries of the turmoil of the material existence, from the very beginning of human existence, has been drama. Born out of the release from the womb, the first cry of helplessness thereafter, is in fact the first cry against destiny. The ancient Greeks shrouded it in great poetry and gave birth to immortal Greek tragedies. In the East, great Sanskrit poets raised it to the highest level of aesthetic refinement. At the same time, ordinary masses brought it to their level and made it a vehicle to laugh at their fate and turn those who exploited them, into caricatures and made fun of their inflated egos. So, when broadcasting came into existence, the writers, who, conscious of the power of drama, in moulding the thinking of a society in a fast changing world, were busy writing for the stage. But they soon became conscious of the vast reach that broadcasting had. Many of them felt that this new medium was a more expansive and inclusive vehicle to reach millions of people at a stretch, than plays and films. They, when motivated, started getting interested in this new medium too. It all started somewhere in 1923, when the first drama was got written specially for the sound medium by the father of the broadcasting systems, The British Broadcasting Corporation. During this more than a century of its life, radio drama has evolved itself into the most effective and popular mode of spreading a message to people and waking up their sensibilities to combat and

react to the fast changing human behavior vis-à-vis the fast changing world. It was its reach with the minimum of investment that it had an ever increasing listenership throughout the world.

In spite of its effectiveness in dealing with both day-to-day problems and intricate complexities of society critics did not accept radio plays as part of literature. Yet at the same time, they too, within the four walls of their homes sitting with their families, listened to radio plays and had to admit that these plays had a great impact on society. The credit again goes to B.B.C. for publishing the best of their radio plays in the form of anthologies every year for a long time now and people eagerly awaited their publication. And thus, the world of letters had to accept it as a form of literature.

So, when broadcasting started in India under the name of Indian Broadcasting Service, the department wise classification of music, talks/spoken word, and drama besides news had already got established by the British Broadcast Corporation. This classification had been adopted by other broadcasting services of the world too. The history of the development of radio plays in India is definitely varied, because of our different languages and their dialects. So in the beginning, it naturally started from those regions where radio stations were first established. Especially there, where there was an established stage movement. The history of radio drama is, in itself, a subject of discussion and analysis. It does not come under the scope of these memories. So I proceed.

Films in our country started straightaway with the adaptations of the popular stage plays of that period. But since the foundation of our broadcasting system in the country was laid on the pattern of the B.B.C, we did not have to start like that. The technique of writing for radio had been already evolved by that broadcasting system. So we had a blueprint with us. Since our initial grooming was done by the programme officers from All India Radio who had been trained by instructors from B.B.C., we started the production of radio plays almost as professionals. The veteran writer Prem Nath Pardesi was assigned the job of handling the Drama section. So, in a broader sense, we can say that he was the first

Producer of Drama in Radio Kashmir Srinagar and we, Mahinder Kaul, Bashir Butt, Santosh Kohli, Shambhu Sharma and I had the privilege of having acted in his productions in the initial stages. Unfortunately death cut Pardesi Sahib's career short.

Till 1954 the major language of our broadcasts was Urdu, except for our folk music, programme for our rural audiences, and the Kashmiri news bulletins. This continued, till 1954, when Radio Kashmir was taken over by All India Radio. Radio Drama, although having started with a whimper, had in a short span of time attained unpredicted popularity. It also proved to be an honest and dynamic vehicle in dealing with the socio-economic problems of a fast changing scenario of the life of the people of India after Independence. Pardesi Sahib, who was basically a short story writer, had tried his hand at playwriting, when we were in The National Cultural Front. The martyrdom of the fearless freedom fighter Mohammad Maqbool Sherwani had shaken us all. After some deliberations, it was decided that we definitely should stage a play on his life and his sacrifice to save his motherland. So we decided that we should go to Baramullah as a team of the National Militia, (National Cultural Front being a part of it), to sympathise with the agony of the people there besides collecting material for the play. The team comprised Qaisar Qalandar, Sallh-u-Din, Prof. Mahmood Hashmi, Giridhari Lal Dhar, Prem Nath Pardesi and myself, under the command of one Captain Suri, who claimed to have been part of the Indian National Army. It was he who had given us elementary training in wielding a 303 gun. We had landed in Baramullah just at the time when that great martyr Maqbool Sherwani was being buried in his ancestral cemetery in the old Baramullah town. Pardesi Sahib was so moved by the stories of havoc inflicted upon the defenseless people of Baramullah, that he not only wrote the play *Shaheed Sherwani* but also another play *Sawali*, a heart rending tale of a refugee couple seeking justice after their home had been gutted and looted by the raiders.

I vividly remember that day. Each one of us was issued a 303 gun being part of the National Militia. We were travelling in a rickety

lorry of the transporters Allied Charagh Din & Sons. After collecting as much material as possible in Baramullah, our commander Captain Suri asked us to take our seats in the lorry and ordered that we should proceed to the front and march towards Rampur. While writing about the incident that followed I laugh at our foolishness then. We did not realize where this Sardar was leading us to. It was late afternoon. Because of the tall mountain range on the west the light of the setting sun was fast fading out. Capt. Suri gave the command "Boys guns out." Orders had to be obeyed. So we rested the barrels of the guns on the window frames and waited for the next command. The road being narrow and the light failing, our driver, the lovable old Aziz Din started getting worried. We had travelled hardly half a mile towards Rampur when guns started booming in the forest above, from one ridge to the other. The gunfire kept increasing. Sardar Suri became nervous and in a shaking voice ordered, "Boys! We retreat!" In spite of the fear of getting caught in the cross fire of the Indian Army and the Qabailis we could not hold our laughter seeing the valiant captain out of his wits. The driver Aziz Din losing his cool, cursed his fate and this ex-Captain. He could not put on his headlight and driving in that darkness was extremely hazardous. It was Aziz Din's grit and experience that brought us back to the deserted Baramullah Bazaar. Though famished, we did not think it proper to stop there and started on our return journey. While travelling back to Srinagar, the sight was horrifying. The harvested paddy and stalks of it in heaps in the fields on both sides of the road were ablaze. That signalled that there were some Qabailis still around, hiding but active who had set them afire.

After our return, both the plays 'Shaheed Sherwani' and 'Sawali', written by Pardesi were successfully staged. So, with the experience of playwriting at his back, Pardesi Sahib, when appointed by Radio Kashmir, was allotted the Drama Department by K.S. Mullick the Officer on Special Duty from A.I.R. It goes to Mr. Mullick's credit that correct selection of programme personnel was made done then groomed for Radio Kashmir Srinagar in its

inception.

As already said, Urdu being the main language of our broadcasts in the beginning, quite a few scripts of plays, already produced and broadcast from the Delhi and Lucknow stations of All India Radio, were procured and produced and broadcast to start with. These were written by veterans like Krishen Chander, Saadat Hasan Manto, and Upendra Nath Ashk. There were some written by Rajender Singh Bedi. Some of these plays were broadcast before Partition from All India Radio, Lahore too. These stalwarts had been on the staff of All India Radio before they had moved to Bombay to try their luck in films. Manto migrated to Pakistan a little later from Bombay. He was the only scriptwriter who used to write on the contrived Urdu script of that time on his favourite typewriter. This was a boon for the drama producers as he would put in carbon sheets to make the required copies simultaneously for the cast. We were thrilled to see Manto's typed scripts and tried to preserve them as precious souvenirs. I could read the old Urdu script, which was known in Kashmir as '*kil chaamp*' quite easily. Because of my familiarity with the script, I insisted on using one of the copies of that genius's typed script to perform my role in his famous play, *Jebkatra*.

The first group to form a sort of a production team, under the command of Prem Nath Pardesi, comprised Mahinder Kaul, Mohan Lal Aima, Bashir Butt, Yash Sharma, Santosh Kohli, Amina Shirin, Phool Sawhney and myself. Later on, Abdul Rashid Bandey, Jalal Geelani, too would participate, keeping in view the number of characters in a script. Santosh Kohli and Amina Shirin were the earliest female announcers but were not Kashmiri speaking. It was a little later that my wife, Shanta Kaul, who was teaching in The Oriental College for Women, was motivated by Shri A.L. Maini, who had listened to her talk, broadcast from our studio, appreciating her diction and quality of voice, to join Radio Kashmir, as an announcer for both Urdu and Kashmiri. That was a time when Kashmiri society was not prepared to think, that Kashmiri women should work together with men in a department, especially in

broadcasting which was considered to be an organization of glamour like films. So, the credit of blazing a trail for Kashmiri girls to come forward and become part of this noble medium of education, information and entertainment goes to her. As such she too became part of the drama group that I was talking about.

Though we had the specimens of radio plays with us, all of us had the urge to explore the possibility of going beyond of the traditional way of storytelling and use sound as a powerful medium of conveying what would compensate for the visual effect which a radio play lacked. And to satiate this urge there could be no better guide than the British Broadcasting Corporation. And it is this passion that made us have long discussions on the experiments B.B.C. had been doing. Though recordings of their plays were not available we somehow managed to procure published anthologies of B.B.C. radio plays which were published every year. That is how, after broadcasting All India Radio plays like Krishen Chander's *Qahira Ki Ek Sham*, Mantoo's *Jebkatra*, and *Napoleon Ki Aakhri Raat*, Upendra Nath Ashk's *Parda Uthao Parda Girao*, Prem Nath Pardesi wrote *Mustasum Ki Aakhri Raat*. It was about the struggle of a poet king of the Middle East, *Mustasum*, who, through circumstances and conspiracies of his own men, was doomed. This play was very well received because it had very powerful characterization and had created a convincing ambience of the locale through music and sound effects that conveyed the journeys of caravans through deserts and mirages etc. I remember how Pardesi Sahib and I along with the sound engineer Kewal Krishan Gupta, spent late night hours to record orchestral music from Radio Teheran. I remember, how snatches of the movement of the caravans from some old film songs were collected and joined and later on used when the play *Mustasum Ki Aakhri Raat* was broadcast, in which I played the role of *Mustasum*. Mir Ghulam Rasool Nazki, to whom both Mahinder Kaul (later on of the BBC) and I are indebted for teaching us the nuances of the Urdu language, had selected Arabic couplets which were supposed to be those of *Mustasum*. It was because of his guidance that I could recite them

in the play to great effect. Digitized By eGangotri

That was a time when all the broadcasts were live. This will be a tough job now. But it was a challenge for us then, and we took it up. The younger generation of broadcasters will not perhaps appreciate what a great feeling of achievement we used to have after every broadcast.

Another play written by Pardesi Sahib comes to my mind while talking about those early days of broadcasting in Kashmir. It was titled *Woh Raat Habba Khatoon Ki*. There is a story about a gardener, who gets mesmerized by the beauty of his queen Habba Khatoon to such an extent, that he leaves everything in life and starts getting physically consumed day by day. His wife somehow reaches the Queen and falls at her feet and prays that she should bring some sense into her pig-head husband, so that he wakes up and cares for her and his children. He was pining to have only a few moments with Her Majesty in her bed chamber. That was the only thing he wanted in his life. After some thinking, Habba Khatoon tells her to convey to her husband that the queen has agreed to his plea, and shall be glad to have him in her bed chamber not only for a few moments, but for a whole night. Besides this Habba Khatoon asks the gardener's wife, that she too should come to the palace an hour before him. Hearing this, the gardener puts on the best of his attires and waits for the queen's men to come and escort him to the palace.

There in the palace, the queen dresses the gardener's wife, who had slipped into the palace before her husband, in the best of her clothes and smears exotic perfumes on her. It is now night. The gardener is brought into the presence of the queen. She tries to make him comfortable. She sends everybody away and then leads the gardener to the bed chamber and tells him to wait till she changes, in the adjacent chamber. She warns that he should not light the candles, lest they are caught, shamed and punished. After saying this she brings the gardener's wife quietly to the bed chamber and instructs her to enter and behave as if she was the queen and talk very little and that too in whispers. The door is closed and the

gardener gradually relaxes and gets drowned in the illusion that he is with the queen. As the night wanes away, there is a knock of the door. Both get scared and the gardener's wife thanks him in whispers, and quickly rushes out of the room. So, highly elated the gardener is dropped at his house. That was the story of the play, a fantasy of course.

I have done quite a bit of research on 'Habba Khatoon' and her times. But I have not come across this story in the large number of stories and myths attributed to her. Anyway the purpose of mentioning it here, was to show, how, through sound and music this delicate story was turned into a radio play, keeping the moral intact while depicting the scene of the night in the queen's bed chamber. Pardesi Sahib's sudden demise in his early fifties was an irreparable loss to the world of literature and especially to Radio Kashmir. With a towering personality, first with a pink turban that was later on replaced by a cap of otter fur, Prem Nath Pardesi, was a great human being with a terrific sense of humour. Once a copyist was somewhat reluctant to copy a script which he thought, was not a part of his assignment. Pardesi Sahib looked at us and said, "Look at him. The paper lying before him is provided by the government, the pen and the ink too is provided by it, the writing pad too is provided by the *sarkar* and thus, without spending a penny he is going to get his hand writing polished absolutely for free. And look at this man - he does not get benefitted by this free favour." We all laughed. Even the copyist could not withhold his laughter and quietly picked up the pen and started writing. That was his way of getting his work done. Though he could not himself act, he had the knack for extracting the best from an artist during rehearsals. Because he knew that the actor on radio was beyond his control once he was on air, just like the stage actor who once on stage is his own master. So, a thorough pre-production grooming of the artist was the quality of a competent radio producer.

After Pardesi Sahib's demise, production of dramas was alternately assigned to Bashir Butt and me. We both had been class fellows from our high school days and had acted together in many

plays staged by the College Dramatic Club. Besides that, we had been acting in almost every play broadcast by Radio Kashmir Srinagar along with Mahinder Kaul Mohanlal Aima, Santosh Kohli, Phool Sawhney and other women artists. This assignment was given to us, in addition to our normal work which were: broadcasting news and presenting programmes for me and looking after the transmissions as a Transmission Assistant for Bashir Butt. There were other programmes too in which we would participate. As our mentor at that time, K.S. Mullick, had given us the 'mantra' that once we got into broadcasting, we should become part of the whole system and try to get involved in every programme that was conceived and presented. This advice helped us as we grew with the maturing of Radio Kashmir Srinagar. That was how we fitted into any groove of broadcasting that we were put in.

Fortunately for us, another of our college friends, Ali Mohammad Lone too joined the bandwagon. He was initially appointed Programme Secretary. He had established himself as an Urdu short story writer even when in college. His joining the Radio was a boon for us, because we were trying to motivate the handful of fiction writers in Kashmir to try their hand at radio play writing. After sometime even Qaiser Qalander, who was posted by the state government in Delhi, also got transferred to Srinagar. He was senior to both Bashir Butt and me in college, but being a member of the S.P. College dramatic club with us, we had become great friends. He too became a part of our efforts to create a powerful Drama wing in Radio Kashmir Srinagar.

Thus, now with this team in position, we forged ahead. We started with adaptations of famous short stories from world literature without caring about their royalty. To be frank, we were not even aware of it at that time, that there was something called a copyright law. O'Henry, Maupassant, Gorky and Thomas Hardy were our favourites. Qaiser Qalander transformed even famous narrative English poems into verse plays like *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* by the great English poet Coleridge and Shelley's *Prisoner of Zenda*. I very well remember how I tightened a muffler round

my throat to bring about coarseness of an old sailor in my already gruff voice, while playing the role of the Ancient Mariner. It was an experiment because I did not have the training required in voice modulation then. Thereby, I helped Qaiser Qalandar, who was also producing this verse play, in creating the required effect of the tragedy of the helplessness of the protagonist in the play. Thus, without any regular training we kept on experimenting, failing in the process, and then through self assessments and co-workers' criticisms succeeded in setting a reasonably good standard of quality productions.

With the passage of time, our radio plays started gaining popularity. And with that the spectrum of artists too kept on widening. Some colleagues like Mahinder Kaul and Santosh Kohli left. They were followed by Sheela Bhatia, Achala Sachdev, and the Lakhwara sisters, Sumitra and Santosh. Sheela Bhatia was an active member of the Indian Peoples Theatre, which was part of the Progressive Movement in the country. She, along with Achala Sachdev had come from Delhi to give a helping hand to the activities of the National Cultural Front, which was also part of the Progressive Movement. Besides that, they would participate in our programmes too as casual artists. Sheela Bhatia worked as a Punjabi news reader and a drama voice. Achala Sachdev had been commissioned to act as *Habba Khatoon* in Prof. Mujeeb-ul Rehman's stage play based on the life of this legendary poet of Kashmir with the blessings of no less a person than Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah himself. But when the script was submitted to the state government, Sheikh Sahib got the project shelved. As Prof. Mujeeb had made the Shia Sunni conflict the cause of Yusuf Shah Chek's deceitful arrest by the Mughal Shahshenshah Akbar and the tragedy of Habba Khatoon, Sheikh Sahib thought it would vitiate the peaceful atmosphere of the state.

Though the production of the play was cancelled, Achala Sachdev stayed back for quite a few months. She also worked as a casual artist for that period as our Pothohari newsreader and a Drama Voice. She later on left for Bombay and became a famous

star in films. Sheela Bhatia too left after some time. Both, being professional artists, helped in grooming fresh talent during the period they were in Kashmir. But they had wider fields awaiting them in Delhi and Bombay. So, after a couple of years they moved there.

Mahinder Kaul too was also forced by one of his frustrating personal problems to give up his job and leave Kashmir. He decided to go to Bombay to try his luck in films. I gave him a letter of introduction to Balraj Sahni with whom I had developed a close relationship because of the Progressive Movement of writers, artists, musicians and theatre workers. After the experience of a small role in Khwaja Ahmed Abbas's film *Anhoni*, on the recommendation of Balraj Ji, Mahinder Kaul felt that he could not make any worthwhile place for himself in films.

Here destiny again played its role in his favour, and brought him back to the line he was cut for, which was broadcasting. He came back to Delhi, not Srinagar and got a job as an Urdu newsreader in All India Radio. From there, how he got into Voice Of America, then into BBC, and then into the hotel business in London and got an OBE from the Queen of England is a story by itself and not connected with Radio Kashmir. Yes, he did continue to have contact with his old friends here in Kashmir. He was keen to start a TV and film production company in Srinagar to project the real Kashmir to the outside world. We kept on discussing every aspect of production and other technicalities about it, when his annual visits to Kashmir became frequent in the eighties. And finally in 1989 he did float a company in partnership with Ghani Khan a trader who had acted in a tele film *Habba Khatoon* (directed by Bashir Badgami), O.P. Khashu (one of my favourite actors in radio and on stage as well), and myself. A partnership deed was duly signed with Vijay Dhar holding power of attorney on behalf of Mahinder Kaul. A blueprint was also prepared and through his partners in his hotel business in Hong Kong we got all the literature and quotations etc. of the latest available equipment. But then came the fateful year of 1990 and this dream of ours too died, like also

many other dreams.

Coming back to my days in broadcasting, Mahinder Kaul's departure did create a vacuum in broadcasting for some time. He had a baritone that was an asset for a news reader. More than that, he was my partner in presenting one of the most powerful and popular daily programmes *Jawabi Hamla* that countered the propaganda of Pakistan Broadcasts from *Tradkhal* under the name of the so called Azad Kashmir Radio. This programme, written by Prem Nath Pardesi and Mir Ghulam Rasool Nazki was hitting Pakistan so hard that it was aggressively discussed even in Pakistan's Parliament. Another daily programme, that very effectively was presented by Mahinder Kaul, was *Gunbad Ki Awaz*, a rebuttal to all the propaganda programmes broadcast during the day from Tradkhal especially their programme *Zarb-e- Kaleem*. *Gunbad Ki Awaz* was the last programme of our day's broadcast and was again written on the spur of the moment by Pardesi Sahib and after his death by Nazki Sahib. We saw to it that these two programmes did not lose their punch and popularity after the departure of Mahinder Kaul. So Bashir Butt replaced Mahinder and later on our Urdu newsreader Abdul Rashid also took over from me. I shall fail in my duty if I do not mention the contribution of Kailash Shanglu, one of the three Officers on Special Duty from AIR, who would produce these programmes. Two others were Ranbir Vohra, elder brother of the present Governor of J & K state Shri N.N. Vohra, and A. L. Maini, who was senior to the other two and as such at the helm of affairs.

The above portion of the narrative should normally have been part of our news and current affairs' programmes. But as these two programmes needed proper dramatic presentation, I thought it proper to mention them here. This verbal confrontation between Radio Kashmir and so called Azad Kashmir Radio, carried on at an erratic graph in accordance with the political developments between India and Pakistan. So these programmes started losing the sheen they had at some stage. Finally they were stopped.

As radio plays were gaining more than the expected popularity,

my main faculties kept moving towards the production of dramas, which was but natural, as I was basically a product of theatre. Though I kept on reading the news and announcing, I would associate myself with my friend Bashir Butt, who had been given charge of the Drama section for some time. We both brought Ali Mohammad Lone into our fold as a writer. Thus, we formed a sort of a team that started seriously thinking of getting quality scripts written and finding ways of utilizing and experimenting with whatever technical facilities we had, while producing them. During that period we were lucky to have some well known Urdu writers from outside like Arjun Dev Rashk, Suhail Azimabadi, Salam Machli Shehri, Jagan Nath Abid and Muztar Hasrmi who had joined our staff. They had been deputed by All India Radio to Radio Kashmir Srinagar to augment the much needed talent for script writing. Arjun Dev Rashk, a good broadcaster himself, was a prolific writer and a very good human being. He originally belonged to Mirpur. That way he belonged to the erstwhile undivided state of Jammu and Kashmir. So he jelled with us immediately. He became quite sentimental on talking about his home that he had been forced to leave behind. Though much senior to both Shanglu and Vohra, he had no pretensions about his position and would mix with even the so called class four employees. To be honest, we, who belonged to the state government then, were overawed by the O.S.Ds from All India Radio, not knowing that they had the same position in A.I.R as we had in Radio Kashmir that still was part of the state Ministry of Information & Broadcasting. This became clear when Mohan Lal Aima too was taken by A.I.R on its staff. It was probably because of the fact that we had just got free from the yoke of Dogra rule during which we had developed an inferiority complex. But it was a fact that all the three had been picked up from the prestigious Govt. College, Lahore by no other person than the broadcasting genius Zulfikar Ali Bukhari, who had himself groomed them. So they knew their job well and we did benefit from that.

All the three of them were tall, and that gave them an impressive personality. Kailash Shanglu was a jolly good man and had jelled

with us very easily. Perhaps he was conscious of his Kashmiri lineage. He took delight in learning Kashmiri slang and used it without looking at who was around. A. L. Maini, a thorough gentleman was a considerate administrator as well as an able programme man. Being at the helm of affairs in planning of programmes, he was favourably receptive to our suggestions. Ranbir Vohra was slightly high flown and a little snobbish in the beginning. But as time passed he too became one of us. Better equipped with knowledge, he was a better guide than others as for the the production of programmes was concerned. The credit of training our early announcers and news readers goes to him. Tall, like the other two, but leaner than them with spectacles on, he had a scholarly look. His humour was subtle, sometimes hard hitting. He was very well-read. He later on left All India Radio and shifted to America and joined a university as a member of the faculty. But even then, he had not forgotten his days in Radio Kashmir Srinagar. He came to Kashmir after a long gap a couple of times. Once in Srinagar, he tried to get in touch with old friends of Radio Kashmir. I remember how nostalgic we became when Ali Mohammad Lone and I spent an evening with him on one of his visits before disturbances started in Kashmir. My friend Abdul Rashid recently told me that he had come again last year and was staying in Raj Bhawan in Srinagar, obviously with his brother, and had enquired about us all. That was the charm that working in Radio Kashmir Srinagar had.

Coming back to the history of radio plays in Kashmir, I mentioned these names in this connection for the reason that they, though not directly with the Drama section, would always be there, to guide and encourage us, in the early days, when this medium was absolutely new for us. Arjun dev Rashk had a good voice and would take pleasure in participating in our drama productions as an artist, even though he was in a senior position than us. I remember how obliged he felt when I expressed the desire to include him in the cast of the play *Yusuf Shah Chack ki Aakhri Raat*, that he had himself written. He also, after some time left All India Radio and

joined Raj Kapoor's R. K. Studios in Bombay and wrote films like '*Jis Desh Mein Ganga Behtee Hai*' for Raj Kapoor.

After many years when he came to know that I was in Bombay and was staying with Balraj Sahni, he made it a point to meet me there. That was the time when we were doing the scripting of the feature film on Mehjoor. When he came to 'Ikram', Balrajji's bungalow in Juhu, Balrajji too was home. It was a memorable evening when Balraj Ji and Rashk became very emotional about the Partition as both had been forced to leave their homes behind, Balrajji in Rawalpindi and Arjan Dev Rashk in Mirpur. I could feel the pangs of this horrific tragedy of Indian history as my state too had got divided. I however did not know that because of the division of the country, a similar tragedy would befall my land Kashmir one day, when thousands and thousands of its inhabitants would be forced to leave their home and hearth. When the topic was changed by Rashk, to Kashmir and Radio Kashmir he became nostalgic and enquired about everybody's welfare. I was surprised that he even remembered the names of the peons who worked with us. It was unfortunate that Arjan dev Rashk passed away after a few years. He was still young. Such were the people who had laid the foundation of Radio Kashmir Srinagar along with us. The wheel of time kept moving and Radio Kashmir Srinagar, gradually earned a place of pride amongst the stations of All India Radio.

I must, in the same context, mention another outstanding personality of All India Radio, who was sent to Srinagar to help in writing daily features. His name was Muztar Hashmi, down to earth and very well versed in Urdu as well as the idiom of the common man in that part of the Punjab which is now in Pakistan. I record his contribution here in this segment of drama because what he created was probably the forerunner of the daily soap opera in Radio Kashmir. Muztar Hashmi scripted a daily programme of counter propaganda entitled *Nawishta-i-Deevar*. This programme was embedded with humour and hard hitting satire through the lovable character of *Fattoo Kochvan* talking in what we call Gulabi Urdu laden with the flavour of Punjabi spoken by the man in the

street in Lahore. It was through this programme that my friend of college dramas, the veteran actor Kedar Sharma was introduced to broadcasting. He played the central character, *Fattoo Kochvan* with excellent impact. Muztar Hashmi not only wrote the script but also acted as the counter character to *Fattoo Kochvan* in this daily soap opera. Besides this programme, I brought Kedar Sharma, popularly called Kari Shah by everyone who knew him closely, into the drama section, first as an effects man and later on as a Production Assistant when I became its head. He later on became a household name as *Munshi Allah Rakha* of *Vadi Ki Aawaz*. Muztar Hashmi went back to All India Radio after a few years and with that programme *Navishta-e-Deevar* was also wound up.

Before I trace the regular history of the development of radio plays in Kashmir, I would like to continue with the genre of daily soap operas that had started with *Navishta-e-Deevar*. The tone and content of our counter propaganda kept on changing vis-a-vis our relations with Pakistan, which was blow hot blow cold from time to time. For instance when Pakistan sent the so called *mujahids* to Kashmir to vitiate the peace of the valley and then waged a regular war in 1965, Radio Kashmir Srinagar immediately rose to the occasion to defeat the laughable tirade of disinformation, that the enemy had started through its dummy radio stations. And to expose its lies and make fun of them, we sat down to plan our strategy. Nand Lal Chawla, a planner to the hilt, was the Station Director at that time. It was his brainchild to start a daily programme in Kashmiri too besides the Urdu programmes we had for this purpose. He conveyed this to me to give it a thought. An idea stuck while talking about it with my friend Pushkar Bhan. We both thought that creating caricatures rather than characters would be the best way to make a parody on these war mongers, who for the second time after 1947, were trying to take Kashmir by force. This idea was discussed with Chawla Sahib who liked it, and thus came the most popular daily soap operas of that time, *Votal Buji* into existence.

The programme, scripted by Pushkar Bhan and at times by

Somnath Sadhu, produced by me, became an instant hit and continued till the end of the war and the signing of the Tashkent Agreement. I must give full credit to Pushkar Bhan not only for the scripting but also for acting in it and the inimitable Mohammad Abdullah of the rural programme, who played the role of *Hakim Charakhcoon*, the incredibly witty court jester advising his dictator master, pandering to his hollow and bloated ego.

The tone of the counter propaganda had to change after the Tashkent Agreement between India and Pakistan. So this daily programme *Votal Buji* had to be stopped. But it did lay the foundation of such daily programmes in Radio Kashmir. We did not want to lose the tremendous popularity that Radio Kashmir Srinagar had gained during the war. These were now the days of peace. Those who have passed through that phase will agree that the end of the war had brought about a much needed era of peace, which lasted for almost five years, a peace that Kashmir had seldom seen earlier. As such, our attention was drawn towards such programmes that would make the days fruitful and productive. During the days of war, normal life was disrupted and it was a time to restore normalcy to people's lives. The state was fortunate to have a person of Khwaja Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq's stature as the Chief Minister at that time. A man of high integrity without any blemish, he was very keen that there should be an agency which would project the day to day problems of the people. The media, especially radio could play the role of a vigilante in this task. Chawla Sahib too was keen that radio should continue playing its role to project the problems of the people in such a way that it would help in cleansing the ills of the society including corruption and nepotism. It was this desire that gave birth to the daily sitcom *Zoona Dab*.

This programme, conceived with this noble intention in mind, in no time, became extremely popular and an integral part of every Kashmiri's life. The credit for its popularity goes to Som Nath Sadhu and Pushkar Bhan, who jointly wrote the script, acted in it and then produced it. No script, howsoever good, can become

effective unless it has a suitable cast. This programme had the good fortune of having artists like Maryam Begum, Jagger Nath Saqi, Sharif-u-din, Ashok Kak and the child artists Bashir Arif and Nayeema Ahmed who measured up to the acting talent of those two veterans. Later on, even Farooq Nazki joined and added another hilarious dimension to the programme. The topic was discussed daily with Chawla Sahib and thoroughly checked, after which, the script was written. It helped Sadiq Sahib who did not miss even a single broadcast, to get apprised of the day-to-day problems of the people. The approach of the programme was humorous with a sprinkling of hard hitting satire. The three main characters, *Aga Saeb*, *Aga Bai* and *Momapicha*, in no time became household names.

Once, a delegation of government officers went to Sadiq Sahib, to complain that this programme was critical of the administration which could have a negative impact on the minds of the people about the government. Sadiq Sahib patiently listened to them as was his habit, and then told them, "You set your house right, then nobody will dare raise a finger at you. It is better you keep on listening to this programme daily. It will give you too an idea of the lacunae that even you, being at the helm of affairs, may not be conscious of." In the history of Indian broadcasting, there is no other instance other than *Zoona Dab*, where three main actors of one programme were awarded the *Padma Shri*.

Another daily series born immediately after the 1965 war was *Vadi Ki Awaz* basically a programme for listeners in Pakistan and Pakistan occupied Kashmir. It conveyed to them news about the ambitious projects of development that were being executed in the state. At the same time the purpose was to keep a format ready to strongly counter the propaganda that Pakistan might launch any time along with a new tirade of hostility towards India. I again give full credit to Shri Chawla for sowing the seeds of this programme in my mind. It was a privilege for me to have been involved at the very outset from its conception to execution. Chawla Sahib insisted that I must get its signature tune composed and record

its opening announcement in my voice which I did.

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I selected Kedar Sharma who had by that time become part of the Drama section as the fatherly figure, *Munshi Allah Rakha*, Uma Khosla, a casual drama artist at that time as Nikki Aapaa; and later on another drama voice Manohar Prothi too was inducted into the programme. Having been fascinated by Kedar Sharma's playing the role of *Fattu Kochwan* we made him use the same Gulabi Urdu with a rustic flavour of the Punjabi dialect spoken in the *Doaba* area of the Punjab as he did in *Navishta-e- Deevan*. Honouring the spirit of the Shimla Agreement, we had stopped broadcasting programmes that would spoil relations in spite of the fact that the so called Azad Kashmir's programmes were still simmering with hostility. We made *Vadi Ki Awaz* a programme of information about the progress our country was making, and at the same time full of entertainment. After sometime Shanta Kaul the veteran broadcaster was brought in, to present the listeners' choice of film music and replies to their letters. Because of its presentation and the programme presented by Shanta Kaul, *Vadi Ki Awaz* became so popular that the number of letters and requests from different parts of Pakistan and the Pak occupied areas kept on increasing day after day. I had instructed my staff that these letters should be kept separately and preserved.

I am reminded in this context of a very interesting incident. The Minister of Information & Broadcasting, Govt. of India was at that time Shri K.K. Shah. He had come to Srinagar on an official tour. He paid a visit to our studios which was on his itinerary. During his meeting with the programme officers, we were apprising him of the popularity of our programmes and the response of listeners that we were getting in the daily mail. He, like many snobbish politicians, did not seem impressed. When I saw this, I informed him that we have been getting lots of letters from even Pakistan and Pak Occupied Kashmir. He looked around, gave a sarcastic smile and said, "I know how these letters are concocted." I excused myself and went out of the conference room and asked my assistant Motilal Kachru to quickly send somebody to get one of the bags of

letters we had preserved. I went back and sat quietly in my seat. The minister was making us wise by his rhetoric about the role of AIR and our shortcomings. The door was opened quietly by Moti Lal followed by a peon carrying the sack of letters. Minister Shah stopped speaking, obviously annoyed. Before he could lose his cool I said, "Excuse me sir, I had told you that we were getting hundreds of letters from Pakistan. Here are some of them." Motilal opened the bag and placed the letters on the round table in front of the minister. Hiding his embarrassment, Mr. Shah picked up a few letters and checked the postage stamps on them. And kept on repeating, "Good, good, good!" and then tried to shake off his embarrassment, "I meant to say that normally some people, to exhibit their popularity, do concoct things." Shri Chawla who was as usual quietly assessing the situation, for the first time commented and said, "Programme officers in this station do not concoct things sir, I assure you! We do not get just letters from places as far as Karachi but also small gifts for some announcers and other staff. That shows how we have kept in touch with the common man there." This was a fact. Shanta Kaul, who was presenting replies to the listeners' letters and the *farmaishi* programme in *Vadi Ki Awaz* was getting lots of these gifts from Pakistani women.

The scripting of the programme was assigned to two stalwarts, Umesh Kaul and Bansi Nirdosh. The dialogue and compering was written by Umesh Kaul and the commentary on current events by Bansi Nirdosh. The credit of the popularity of this programme goes to their scripts too. Later on, Ghulam Nabi Rattanapuri who subsequently joined politics and was elected Member of Parliament, added his journalistic talent to this programme for a long time.

These programmes, *Votalbuji* and *Zoonadab*, though strictly speaking, not radio plays, did establish programmes that reflected the aspirations of the people, have guaranteed acceptability and popularity. I kept this truth uppermost in mind when I took overall charge of the Drama Department. In between, I offered to take charge of the children's weekly programme too. We had not yet introduced major programmes in Kashmiri. So, this programme

too was broadcast in Urdu. ~~Idiot children~~ as everybody does. So I wanted to have such programmes planned that would educate them through entertainment. What could be more interesting to children than story telling? I had watched how my own small daughter was interested as well as fascinated by comic books. That observation became a source of imagination.

During that very period the great theatre doyen of the country Shanti Bardan of Indian Peoples' Theatre, had come with his troupe to perform in Srinagar. He was a director, a choreographer, a musician, a bird watcher and a writer, all put together. He had minutely studied the movement of birds and animals and had used all his talent in bringing a few stories from the *Panchtantra* to life through his choreography and his actors on stage. The presentation was so fascinating that it made a deep impression on me as a theatre worker. Its presentation was like the animated cartoons of today. I wanted to use sound as a medium for presenting the stories from the *Panchtantra* like he did through the stage. I discussed my idea with Ali Mohammad Lone. He too got fascinated and agreed to write the script for these series. I remember that there was a man by the name of Ama Kral (Ahmed Kumhar), a potter by profession living near the forests in *Kulgam*. He had mastered the art of imitating the calls of a large number of birds and some animals in and around his village. His imitations were so exact that I got tempted to record him for our effects library, which I was keen on building. This jolly good villager was clever too. After recording for about five minutes he suddenly stopped and said, "That is it. If I give you all the store of the bird calls I have, you won't allow me even to enter the studios again and not to talk of offering me another contract."

I had his recording in mind plus other bird calls that our singer and *tumbaknari* master Ghulam Mohammad Butt would vocally produce whenever we needed them, especially in our musical features on the advent of spring. So, with these effects available with me, and Ali Mohammad Lone's scripts in hand I ventured to produce the stories from the *Panchtantra*. In the beginning it was

a difficult job to train the drama voices to mould their voices to give a feel to the children that it really was a crow, a parrot or a lion speaking. This is a special art and today some of the greatest actors of Hollywood and even Bollywood mould and lend their voices to animated characters in cartoon movies. I remember how Javed, Nilofer, and Satender the child artists got excited joining the older drama artists and Yesh Sharma, who through their innovative contributions added effectiveness to the animated productions. These series became popular not only amongst the children but also with grownups. That was how Ali Mohammad Lone and I became the writer-producer team of the future.

Even before 1954, when All India Radio took complete charge of Radio Kashmir, we did venture to start broadcasting of radio plays in Kashmiri. Here I will have to digress once more so as to give a brief history of drama in the Kashmiri language.

The first stage play in Kashmiri, *Satech Kahveat* was written by Pundit Nanda Lal Kaul 'Nana', of Kharayaar, Srinagar an uncle of the noted broadcaster Mahinder Kaul. He had been inspired by some Parsi theatrical companies that used to come during summers from the plains to perform in Srinagar. This play *Satech Kahveat* was the story of the most pious and truthful king *Raja Harish Chander's* supreme sacrifice to uphold his ideals. This play, beautifully written in 1931, in chaste Kashmiri, in rhyming prose with songs in between, was successfully staged in the lawns of Rugh Nath Mandir Srinagar. Here, I wish to correct Dr. Zaffar Hydari, who, on the basis of information given to him by Farooq Nazki has mentioned in his book, 'Radio in Kashmir', that this was the first Kashmiri play broadcast from Radio Kashmir Srinagar. In fact I had seen it on stage when I was just a boy and would try to sing its songs along with other children of my locality. So, it was after 1954 that I was keen to procure a copy of this play and then adapt it for radio. I had been told that *Vishnath Printing Press*, the only printing press in Kashmir at that time, had published it soon after its popularity on stage. Vishnath press had moved from Fateh Kadal to Residency Road but having been our neighbours in our

ancestral home *Bana Mhalla* Srinagar, the proprietors made it possible for me to go to their old press at *Fateh Kadal* from where I was able to dig out a copy. It was only after adapting it for radio that I produced it to be broadcast in 1957.

Anyway, reverting to the history of Kashmiri Drama, we find a big gap between 1931 and 1947. Except for small attempts by Fazil Kashmiri who wrote a few small farces like *Kokri Ka Pakh*, *Laila Majnoon* and others which were recorded on gramophone discs produced by Rajpal & Co in Lahore there is no record. During this period, Prof. Mohiudin Hajni also tried his hand at playwriting, when he wrote 'Grees Sund Gara'. But there is no record available to tell us whether it was ever staged. Another initiative was taken around mid 1945 by the organization *Sudhar Samiti*, a social reform organisation of Kashmiri Pundits by getting a couple of plays written in Kashmiri. These were staged by this organization with great success in the small theatre that the members and the theatre workers had built adjacent to the *Shivala* Temple at *Chotta Bazaar* Srinagar. These plays were confined in the beginning, to focus on social evils in Kashmiri Pundit society.

A beginning was made in real earnest at play-writing in Kashmiri in 1947-48 by members of The National Cultural Front's Music and Drama wing. After the success of the Urdu plays, *Kashmir Yeh Hai*, *Sawli* and *Shaheed Sherwani* on stage, this organisation realised that since a majority of population did not understand Urdu, the purpose of making them aware of the changes that were taking place at a great speed was not fully met. As such, all attention was diverted to the Kashmiri language. So, the dynamic writers of that period like Noor Mohammad Roshan, Som Nath Zutshi, with inputs by me as the director of the drama wing and other members started conceiving and writing plays that could be staged in the open on street corners i.e. *mohallas*, mostly in villages. The outcome was '*Tre Bata Tchore* ($\frac{3}{4}$)', a play to publicize the revolutionary land reform that the 'Peoples government' had introduced, by dint of which the three fourth of the produce would go to the tiller of the land and one fourth to its owner. This was followed by '*Dollar*

Sahab that exposed the conspiracy that the Americans and the British were hatching to somehow gain a foothold in Kashmir. Such efforts were highly successful and it goes without saying that they laid the foundation of Kashmiri language drama. But it did not start immediately in Radio Kashmir Srinagar.

When I analyse it now, I find a few reasons responsible for this. One was that in the beginning most of the attention was paid to broadcasting in Urdu, secondly the medium was alien to our writers. And thirdly we had not yet been able to motivate educated women to come forward and take up broadcasting as a profession. This was a big hurdle in stage productions of Urdu plays too, where female characters were being played by male artists. The credit of fighting this taboo in theatre goes to Balraj Sahni's niece Usha Kashyap, and Dr. Lakhwara's daughters, Sumitra and Santosh and Khurshid Jalal-u-Din (Mrs. Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad) who came forward to act in the Urdu play *Kashmir Yeh Hai*. Kashmiri not being their mother tongue any question of their participation in any Kashmiri play, either on stage or radio did not arise. The first Kashmiri woman to join theatre was Shanta Kaul followed by Sajda Zameer Ahmed. But radio was still a taboo for society as every new venture was. So, that was a big hurdle in the production of plays in Kashmiri. On stage make-up and costumes would help male artists play a female character. But, over the radio the voice was everything; make up, costume, get up, age and everything. So, playing female characters by male artists would have been ridiculous.

In this connection I am reminded of an incident narrated by Mirza Ghulam Hasan Beg Arif when he was, for a short period, our Director, Programmes. He had been deputed from the Sericulture Department to Radio Kashmir, when it was started in Jammu. An ardent lover of the Kashmiri language, he had written a short skit in Kashmiri about an old peasant woman and wanted to have it aired. As none of the few Kashmiri families in Jammu had agreed to let any of their womenfolk participate in this radio programme, he took, it upon himself to do the old lady's role.

Howsoever he tried his voice could not succeed in cheating listeners. He narrated this misadventure in the typical *Beg Style* and said that he thanked his stars that this had not happened in Srinagar.

Now, coming to radio drama in the Kashmiri language, the first effort was made by Syed Hafeezuddin Baihaqui. The play was on *Zain-ul- Abidin Bud Shah*. The effort was commendable. But the fabric of the story was woven in the usual radio feature style. As it was the beginning of broadcasting in Kashmir, we were just exploring this new medium. Baihaqui, having realised that radio playwriting was not his cup of tea, did not attempt to write any other drama after that. But he did keep contributing to the spoken word both in Kashmiri and Urdu, till he was made, first, a programme secretary and then a transmission executive. Hailing from a respected family Baihaqui, was a gentleman par excellence. He had broadcast news in Kashmiri in the early days, but participated in children's programme whenever he was asked to.

As mentioned earlier, the Kashmiri language got a real fillip after 1954, when Radio Kashmir became part of All India Radio. As such, all the major activities that were being planned for the national net work of Indian broadcasting were introduced in Radio Kashmir too. Under this planning was the introduction of the competition for radio playwriting in regional languages for which three prizes were announced for each language. For this, separate funds were allotted to every station. As such, this competition was naturally for the Kashmiri language too. This was a big fillip and incentive to our writers, especially to those who wrote short stories in Kashmiri. When we invited entries for this competition, I was overwhelmed by the response we got. Almost all the short story writers of that time, like Akhtar Mohiudin, Somnath Zutshi, Sofi Ghulam Mohammad Amin Kamil, and Noor Mohammad Roshan expressed their eagerness to compete. With Ali Mohammad Lone, Pushkar Bhan and I, as staff, we were not entitled to participate.

So, within the stipulated time we received more than a dozen scripts. From amongst them, three plays '*Viji Vav*' by Som Nath Zutshi, '*Moma Seatch*' by Mohammad Amin Kamil and '*Miskeen*

Bood' by Noor Mohammad Roshan were selected and placed in ascending order, as first, second and third. The selected plays had to be translated into Hindi so that they could be circulated amongst other stations of All India Radio too for broadcast in their own regional languages. This was besides the cash prizes set aside for the winning script writers. So, if I say that that was the real beginning of a Radio Drama movement in Kashmiri, it will not be an underestimation. Out of these plays, Zutshi's *Viji Wav* was selected later for the National Programme of Plays too, and I had the honour of producing it for the national hook-up in Hindi. In fact, these radio-play script competitions laid the foundation of National Programme of Plays like the National Programme of Music, followed by National Programme of Features and National Programme of Classics. The role of Radio Kashmir Srinagar in them will be discussed later. We are presently talking about the development of Radio Drama in Kashmir.

By this time Radio Kashmir had crossed its days of infancy and was maturing quite fast. This was because of a fire in educated youths, working and learning from the older generation who guided them. The medium of sound had got revolutionized worldwide. Technical advancement had travelled fast from the recording of sound and reproducing it, from wire recordings to Presto recording then to gramophone discs and from there to LP discs, and then onwards to magnetic tape recordings. Though the speed was slow, these formats did reach All India Radio and through it, its fast expanding network, all over the country. Radio Kashmir Srinagar was lucky to have been put on the priority list. When the first consignment of EMI tape recorders reached the stores of All India Radio, to be distributed amongst its different stations we got our share from the very first consignment.

I remember how impatient we were when they were installed in the recording room by our engineers. To record a well-written and well produced play so that it could be rebroadcast and preserved for the future was a great thrill. Up to that time, the only way to do that was to record it on Presto discs. These were 7" and 15"

aluminum discs coated with a thin layer of highly inflammable material. They could be replayed only two to three times. Besides that, we had only one such recorder. And as such we could not have a continuous recording. So we had to give a break during the recording, after every seven or fifteen minutes according to the size of the disc we were recording on. So you can imagine how thrilled we must have been when these tape recorders arrived in our studios in Polo Ground. The entire staff crowded in the small recording room and the corridor. We, the broadcasters, went gaga, "God!!! We shall listen to our own voices now!"

These two boxes with green textured rexin covers marked 'EMI tape recorders', were no less than magic boxes for us in the beginning. It was the engineers who were first trained to operate them. It was after quite some time that a few programme people were allowed to use them. I was lucky to be one of them. It is not modest to write about one's own self. But since I was connected with the production of plays and features that required a sufficient amount of handling of hardware I was the first one from the programme staff allowed to operate them. Besides, it was a necessity. In BBC and other broadcasting services they had Programme Engineers, people who were duly qualified in hardware as well as software in the art of broadcasting. So, I saw to it that my assistants, Kedar Sharma, and Moti Lal Kachroo who were in the beginning designated as Effects Men and later on Production Assistants, got fully trained in sound recording besides myself. Thus, they were as good as the Programme Engineers of BBC.

In fact the Drama Section would not have functioned smoothly had it not been for efficient Programme Secretaries, Hafiz-u-Din Baihaqui, Jagan Nath Bazaz and Noor Mohammad who managed administrative obligations. Later on, quite a few members of the production staff too worked hard and were able to record their own programmes. This was a revolution in broadcasting and improved the quality of our programmes.

Another boon followed. The same EMI manufacturers introduced ultra portable tape recording machines, which operated

on a pack of ordinary battery cells. These were a the diminutive of the big box of the same colour with a strap to hang it by one's shoulder. We nicknamed them '*Naevid Kheus*' (a barber's box). This tape recorder could be carried anywhere and was able to record for 15 minutes at a stretch on a magnetic tape of $\frac{1}{2}$ width. When I saw it and gauged its qualities, I craved taking it out of the studio and record on it. I didnt have to wait for long.

Som Nath Zutshi's play "*Viji Wav*" that had secured the first prize in the First Radio Play Competition was scheduled for broadcast. This is a play set against the backdrop of the mighty *Wullar Lake* and deals with a family of fishermen of this lake. It depicts the boatmen's fight against a life of drudgery and the fury of hurricanes that come swirling through the gorges in the mountains in the north, almost every afternoon. The locals call the storm *Viji Vaw* and the hurricane '*Wava Kone*'. The entire action takes place against this backdrop, which had to be built up through the medium of sound. Though we had the recording of the sound of the fury of the wind in the effects library that we were building, yet the sound of the water being churned and the effect of the vigorous rowing of the boatmen to get out of this deadly whirlpool, could only be recorded in the lake itself. This was the first challenge in my life as Producer of Radio Plays (A very fulfilling life of thirty years, till I moved to films and television). So, I decided to give it a try. The Station Director, P. C. Chatterji, always supportive of such ventures, immediately assented to my proposal.

A couple of days later, our driver, Abdul Aziz, a very interesting man, who would not tire of boasting of having been the chauffeur of Sir Khizar Hayat Khan (erstwhile minister in the Punjab) in his younger days carried me with my talented assistant Kedar Sharma, and the recording engineer Jamil Bakhsh, to the village of *Watlab* on the western bank of the *Wullar Lake* that almost touches the water. We were lucky to reach this fisherman's village much before sunrise. The headman was a great help, especially when we told him that we were from Radio Kashmir. He discussed our plan with a group of young boatmen that would row us almost to the centre

of the lake. From there the lake looks like a sea. We had engaged about a dozen of the fishermen and a couple of elderly hands to organize the operation of deep water fishing in the lake. Thanks to the headman!

This is a very interesting cooperative operation. In the beginning the entire group of fishermen spreads over a vast area of the lake. Once settled thus, they stand up in the boat and then cast their big nets almost simultaneously, with a swing and full strength of their arms to cover as much area as possible. They then row slowly towards each other and then form a circle. Moving closer and closer, they keep on disturbing the water with long poles to scare the fish under. It is after that churning of water that they slowly pull out their nets with the catch, which they empty into their respective boats. After this, they again spread themselves on the lake and the cycle of this activity continues till noon. After the day's catch, they row back towards the bank singing praises of the lake and the patron saint *Baba Shukerdin* whose *Dargah* is on top of the western hill overlooking the lake. We were lucky that the water was calm and we recorded all the sound effects that we wanted with ease.

I had the temptation to wait, at least till the sound of the approaching storm could be heard. But the elderly boatmen vehemently opposed my idea. We had hardly reached the shore when the furious wind came sweeping. We hurriedly recorded whatever we could and returned to Srinagar. It was quite late in the evening when we reached the studio. I got the recorded material hurriedly transferred as I was impatient to see the results of our day's labour. We were thrilled with the result. Though the fury of the hurricane was accompanied by a lot of distortion, because of the wind disturbing its clarity, Kedar Sharma could join some clear bits together which I used in the final recording, supported by the sound effect of the storm I had, and an appropriate music that was specially composed for it. And when the play was later on broadcast in the National Programme of Plays it was highly praised for the atmosphere it had created.

It was the winter of 1956; the date was 26 January. The drafting of the constitution of The State of Jammu & Kashmir had been completed and it had to be now formally passed by the Constituent Assembly chaired by Khwaja Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq. The Durbar (secretariat) had moved to Jammu. This was one of the most important historical events as far as the state was concerned. As by that time, I had gained sufficient expertise in presenting radio reports on such events and in outdoor recordings, I was asked to fly to Jammu to cover this important event.

The Green Banquet Hall in the old palaces in Mubarak Mandi in Jammu, where this historical event had to be solemnized, was bustling with excitement. The auspicious time was fixed at 12 o'clock in the night. The members of the Constituent Assembly, dressed elegantly were slowly pouring in, much before the fixed hour. Everyone was waiting for Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, the Prime Minister and his Cabinet Colleagues. As soon they entered, there was thunderous applause all around. After that there was a silence dignified. Now everyone was waiting for the Chairman of the Constituent Assembly, Khwaja Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq. His arrival was announced with the usual fanfare. And then the proceedings started.

This most important session started much before midnight. There was very tight security all around as there were intelligence reports that Pakistan may try to sabotage the event. But the atmosphere in the hall was of confidence and determination. The proceedings were being recorded through telephone lines on the big Sony tape recorders that had replaced the EMI tape recorders by then, in the Jammu studios. In addition to that, I was given a small corner in the hall itself, for recording the event, on the ultra portable tape recorder as a safety measure. It was decided that I should rush back to the studios immediately, after the function was over, and edit the recording and keep the radio report ready, so that it could be broadcast in the morning, simultaneously from Srinagar and Jammu, immediately after the morning English News bulletin, relayed from All India Radio. The engineers at our Srinagar studios

were already there ready to receive the radio report again through telephone lines, record it, and then simultaneously broadcast it in the morning. Radio Kashmir, Jammu, was lucky to have one of the best sound engineers All India Radio had Shri Bhattacharya, popularly known as Bhatta, as the Station Engineer. He also kept awake, along with his staff that entire night. Keeping the very limited technical facilities available at that time in mind, it was a job executed commendably.

The following day the parade and flag hoisting ceremony was held in Parade Ground, Jammu. After a couple of hours' rest in the morning I had to rush to cover the function and the festivity that followed. The rumour of Pakistan's effort to disrupt the function was still looming large. But in spite of that, thousands of people had gathered there in their best livery. This colourful function took place with extraordinary fervour. This was my first experience in covering such a big outdoor event. The radio report, catching the atmosphere of this historical event, recorded on the small ultra portable tape recorder, too was highly appreciated by the listeners. Jammu Station was not lucky to have an ultraportable tape recorder at that time. So for the staff, especially my counterparts, it was a huge surprise and there was amazement on seeing the functions of this small box.

By this time Radio Kashmir had stopped Pashtu and Pothohari Services and introduced a Gojri service instead. Hence, we had more broadcast time for Kashmiri and Urdu programmes. This gave us the opportunity to concentrate on developments of Kashmiri prose writing. Jagdish Chandra Mathur, who probably was the last officer of the British ICS cadre, had taken over as Director-General of All India Radio. Himself a renowned Hindi dramatist, he wanted to introduce specialization in all the branches of broadcasting, as the quality of the programmes was not improving to his satisfaction. So, he made the Ministry agree to create the Production Cadre other than the Administrative Cadre of Programme Officers.

It was again in the year 1956 that the posts of Programme Assistants and Transmission Assistants were merged. Both of them

were now designated as Programme Executives. Instead of the Transmission Assistants, a new cadre was introduced to look after the transmissions and filling the daily logbooks designated as Transmission Executives. It was a cadre a little above office assistants. Programme Executives were given a choice to opt for the new Production cadre. But there were no takers as their job was a permanent one, while those in the Production Cadre were appointed on five year renewable contracts. I feel pained to mention here that this excellent idea of developing a team of professionals was torpedoed by a sort of a class war between Producers and Programme Executives as the planning and production of programmes was handed over to the Producers. So the Programme Executives with the support of the high-ups in the hierarchy bracketed the Transmission Executives too with them to increase their numbers at the base to increase the number of posts at the top. In that manner they wanted to have overall administrative control over the organisation.

As soon as Shri J.C. Mathur retired they saw to it that the Transmission Assistants post of became stepping stone for promotions. The result was that these people, who had been recruited to fill in the logbooks, a clerk's job, with limited artistic acumen kept on rising and finally becoming heads of the administration while the standard of programmes kept on falling. Seeing their plight and stagnation in their future, the members of the Production Cadre too craved becoming government servants, for which they struggled and finally got regularized around 1996. Thereby the organisation became an organization of generalists and not professionals. The jobs became transferable between All India Radio and Doordarshan. The outcome is there for everybody to see. Even after the formation of the Prasar Bharti Corporation, which was created to give broadcasters freedom from the dictates of the government, all the top brass are government servants and many non-professionals. Hence, the organization had to resort to commission private producers especially in television, to make programmes for it. This has given rise to nepotism and corruption,

resulting in falling standards and poor quality programmes. Diverting all attention to television and ignoring radio, which has a wider reach and greater impact is another folly of the government controlled Prasar Bharti. Thanks to our Prime Minister Narendra Modi who has realised the importance of sound and strength of radio to reach the masses he has introduced his *Man Ki Baat* as a regular radio programme.

It is unfortunate that in our country, projects, howsoever well intentioned, are launched in haste and without intensive planning. That is what happened at the time of the introduction of the Production Cadre in All India Radio. Well known poets, writers, musicians who had a place of prominence in their fields, but had no or very little knowledge of the medium of broadcasting, were motivated to join as Producers at the centre. The result was that they could contribute very little to either planning or production of programmes. Some of them had crossed the age of adaptability. That is why, they soon left the organisation. But, at regional stations, were Station Directors who were in close touch with the functioning of the staff and knew that there were equally qualified people already working hard to raise the standards of broadcasting in the organisation itself. So they stressed on this type of logic and reality, and, finally, got their way in the selection for this cadre of professionals from the staff already employed.

As far as Radio Kashmir Srinagar was concerned, we were lucky to have P. C. Chatterji as our station director, a broadcaster of eminence whose opinion was valued by even the Ministry Of Information and Broadcasting. He refused to recommend people from outside the organisation on the plea that it was better to select competent people from the staff who had proved their worth than inducting people from outside who may be good writers but would be strangers to the medium of broadcasting. His opinion was accepted by the Ministry. And that was how Ali Mohammad Lone and I were the first members of the staff who were appointed first as Producers. We were not even asked to apply. Ali Mohammad Lone was made the Producer for "Kashmiri Spoken Word" and I

the Producer, "Drama, Features and Documentaries" for both the languages, Urdu and Kashmiri. After some time even Kamal Ahmed Siddiqui, the well known Urdu poet, who had stayed back in Srinagar after getting treated in Tangamarg Sanatorium for his ailment was also inducted as Producer for "Urdu Spoken Word."

It was because of this tradition established by P. C. Chatterji that even the Transmission Executives were carefully selected so that they would prove to be competent broadcasters with the passage of time. That is how we had Transmission Executives like Lassa Kaul, Fayyaz Shaharyar and others who became heads of All India Radio and Doordarshan.

Thus, elated, I took charge as Head of the Drama Department of Radio Kashmir Srinagar in 1956. Though I had literarily become fully conversant in almost every branch of broadcasting and had become a household name in Kashmir, I was happy that being Head of Drama, which was my passion, I would be free to fulfill my dream of building and taking Kashmiri Drama which was still in its infancy, on to the national scene. This was a big challenge. For this I had to create a solid and dedicated team to work with me. First, a team of calligraphists cum copyists, who would be conversant with Urdu as well as the Kashmiri script, would have to be created then a Hindi copyist who could transcribe both Urdu and Kashmiri-written scripts into Devnagiri would have to be arranged for. We were lucky to get Ghulam Nabi Hamadani and Ghulam Rasool, very good calligraphists for Urdu and Mohan Nirash for Hindi. Mohan Nirash, an eminent poet and scholar, was soon promoted to the post of Translator and Script writer. His place as a copyist was taken by Uma Dhar. Except for Mohan Nirash who, later on, became a Programme Executive, they all remained an integral part of the Drama section till their retirement.

The second stage was to have an imaginative and dedicated team of my assistants in production. All India Radio had earlier a cadre of Effects Men. But with the introduction of the Production Cadre, Effects Men were designated as Production Assistants, with greater responsibility than the Effects Men. I somehow managed

to motivate Kedar Sharma who again belonged to our college group and was a good actor, to give up his business that was not doing that well and join Radio Kashmir. After first joining as a casual artist, he proved his talent as a drama voice as *Fattoo Kochwan* in the daily programme *Navishta-e-Deedar*. I brought him into my fold as an Effects Man, the job he quickly picked up. So naturally, he was the first Effects' Man, who was promoted to the post of Production Assistant. We got another trained hand, Shri Motilal Kachru, who was transferred from All India Radio's Kashmiri Section in Delhi to Srinagar. Later on, another post of a Production Assistant was sanctioned.

When we advertised this post, quite a few young graduates applied. But when they appeared for their interview, we found that most of them had very little knowledge of literature especially of drama. I remember that in the last batch came a mentally alert young man, Jai Kishen Zutshi, with a Master's in Mathematics. The selection committee, comprising N. L. Chawla the station director and me from the department and experts like Akhtar Mohiudin, and Ali Mohammad Lone as non official members, was somewhat skeptical about his knowledge of literature and radio drama after going through his educational qualifications. But when we started the interview, we were amazed to see that he had a fair knowledge of dramatic literature and also of the genre of Radio Drama. When I tried to corner him and asked questions about mechanical gadgets and innovations used to create sound effects like, for instance, the fury of the wind, falling of torrential rain, blazing fires and the cracking of burning wood, in the studio we were amazed to find that he was aware of every gadget and method used. After the interview was over, it was our unanimous opinion that we had found a really good talent in Jaikishen that could prove an asset for broadcasting. Hence a recommendation for his appointment was submitted to the Director General which was okayed. So, I was quite happy to have found another capable assistant.

I introduced him to Kedar Sharma and directed him to take him around the Drama Studio, the Effect's Library, Echo chamber etc. so that he would be ready to start working. After a few days it so happened that I had to record a play for the National Programme of Plays, a very important assignment. After a few days of rehearsals which I had made Jai Kishen attend too, the recording of the spoken word was completed. I marked the sound effects and the positions of the play where background music was to be used and gave a copy to him. When I entered the studio for mixing I asked him to take out the required effects. Meanwhile Kedar Sharma went to the recording booth and I sat to arrange the sequence of the music already recorded. When after settling down I asked for the effects, I saw Jai Kishen standing somewhat lost in front of the open cupboard of the Effects library. I was about to ask him as to what had happened, when suddenly he fell at my feet and pleaded, "Sir, I don't know anything about sound effects. Know a little about drama, but nothing about sound effects." I was shocked. "But you talked like a professional in the interview. You answered each and every question that was put to you. How was that?" "Sir I had got a couple of BBC publications about Radio Plays and their production process. I had studied them, rather crammed the information as much as I could. I am honest. Now it is up to you to keep me or throw me out!" I was perplexed. This was a unique experience. I called Kedar Sharma from the recording booth and told him to help Jai Kishen in taking out the required effects from the cupboards which he did and I completed the mixing. Jai Kishen Zutshi kept on apologizing. Too stunned to react, I hurriedly left.

The next day, Jai Kishen Zutshi came to my room with his letter of resignation. I made him sit and told him that he couldn't imagine how disturbed I was and had decided to talk to the Station Director about it. After knowing of my decision, he rose to leave and said that it was immaterial now since he had put in his resignation. To be honest, I was afraid that this would tell upon the capability of the entire selection board. To save the situation I had thought of a way out, which was to give a month's time to Jai

Kishen to get trained and see if he could pick up the trade. If he did, he could continue, and if not, we would have to think about it. Though I wasn't happy that he had bluffed us, I was impressed by his honesty and the urge to somehow get into broadcasting. It was after quite some persuasion that he agreed to my offer. And when I look back, I am happy that I took that decision, because after that one month that he spent with Kedar Sharma and me in the studio, I was really touched with his dedication and his capability to learn. Time has proven that my decision was correct because he proved to be an asset and could even independently handle productions.

I was not happy when he applied for a job with Doordarshan but knew that he had a bright future there. I blessed him. His talent took him to even greater heights in Doordarshan. I had developed affection for him, so much so that, even after so many years it continues to be there. That is why I felt elated when he requested me to write the tele-film 'Mashaal' for him. I accepted it without reservation.

Thus, well settled and with a good team I started with missionary zeal to motivate our prose writers who were writing in Urdu to try their hand at playwriting in Kashmiri. The independence and the encouragement that the department gave me helped me go ahead. We had even before that established the 9.30 PM slot of every Monday, which was prime time in broadcasting terminology, for the broadcast of dramas. It had become a habit for listeners to wait for 9.30 p.m. on every Monday night. That meant that we had to procure 52 plays in a year. Out of them half had to be in Kashmiri and the other half in Urdu. There was at the same time the restriction of close booking. That meant that no playwright or artist could be repeated in a quarter, which was the period for which scheduling in advance had to be done. So, the challenge was formidable. This meant that I would have to involve as much of new talent in fiction writing as possible and train them in the technique of radio playwriting.

As soon as I took charge of the Drama Section, I requested established fiction writers to help us in creating a genre of Kashmiri

language radio plays. Writers like Akhtar Mohiudin, Som Nath Zutshi, Sofi Ghulam Mohammad, Amin Kamil besides Ali Mohammad Lone, Pushkar Bhan, Som Nath Sadhu, Shafi Shafai (already on our staff) got charged to try their hand at this new medium after having become conscious of its tremendous reach and popularity. But the number of plays required by us in Kashmiri was to be at least twenty-six per year. The situation in procuring Urdu plays was somewhat better, because we could get scripts from outside the state too. So, we advertised and invited scripts from other writers, especially those belonging to the younger generation. Response was better than expected. In the large number of scripts received in the first lot, we found a few that had some merit. That kindled a hope in me, that if guided properly, these writers could become future playwrights of Radio Kashmir. So I started inviting the writers of these scripts to the office to talk to them. I found genuineness in them. That is why I gave them copies of some model scripts that I had prepared for this purpose and told them to go through them and study the format and then rewrite their plays. This experiment started delivering results. That is how dozens of young playwrights were found and groomed.

With the passage of time, Kashmiri Radio Play started progressing and finally found its place of honour in the family of other regional languages in the country. That is how writers like Bansi Nirdosh Sajood Sailani, Shabnam Qayoom, Sattar Ahmed Shahid, Ghulam Rasool Santosh, Hriday Kaul Bharti, Hari Krishen Kaul, Dr. Shankar Raina, Yaqoob Dilkash, Bashir Dada, Ghulam Nabi Shahid, Avtaar Krishen Rehbar, Noor Shah, Bashir Shah, Hamidi Kashmiri, Dr. Shakeel ul Rehman, Afaaq Ahmed, Sofi Ghulam Mohammad, Anis Hamadani, and Amar Malmohi started writing in right earnest. Even renowned poets like Dina Nath Nadim, Amin Kamil, Muzzafar Aazim, Noor Mohammad Roshan and Rehman Rahi were motivated to contribute to the development of Urdu and Kashmiri Radio Play in the state. This search for obtaining dramas of high quality was not confined to our valley alone but extended up to Jammu. We contacted well-known short

story writers like Ved Rahi, Prof. Madan Mohan Sharma, Narender Khajooria, Jitender Sharma and others to write plays about life in that region, for us. That is how plays like 'Yeh Parbat Mere Nahin', 'Baba Jitoo', 'Doctor Meharban' and 'Band Dareechey' were procured.

It will be dishonesty if I did not confess that my special efforts were more for the development of Kashmiri drama, because drama in Urdu had already been through a history of nearly a century. I am indebted to all the writers mentioned above and those whose names I might have missed for their sincere cooperation, especially those Urdu writers who did not mind writing in Kashmiri as well. The plays they wrote in Kashmiri were very close to the soil and therefore true to life, hence their popularity. They wrote about the day to day life of our people. They wrote about the sufferings of the underdog, about the conflicts in which the upper classes were caught in this fast growing world. They wrote about social evils that are eating into the fabric of our society. They wrote about love, about young romances and broken hearts. They dug into the past and wrote about the golden periods of our history as well as upheavals through which our forefathers had to pass. They wrote about how our ancestors were driven with heavy loads on forced labour through the overhanging avalanches and jaws of death, to Gilgit and Honza. They also wrote about princes and princesses. And we brought these characters to life and made our listeners part of their problems, sitting in their homes amidst their families. Not only that, we through the magic of sound also, created the required atmosphere not only of this world but also of Hell and Heaven that the playwrights created in words. First came Sound, and then the Word, goes the gospel truth.

Sound is called the fourth dimension in films which has a terrific impact on our senses. Music that is basically sound makes you happy as well as sad. The sound of thunder that you are not able to see frightens you. Take the sound off and there is neither music nor thunder. You must have had the experience when, in a cinema hall, sound is lost and only actors are seen gesticulating, people

protest as loudly as they can and shout, "Sound! Sound!! Sound!!! It is recorded in the treatise, "Cinema as an Art" that when sound started getting recorded and played back, Charlie Chaplin, the greatest actor-director of silent films, wailed and protested, "If sound is brought into films, cinema will die." But later on, experiencing the potential of sound, he had to change his contention and produced great talkies which became classics. So, we too tried to make this so called "medium of the blind" as potent, and as effective as any other art form.

Before I narrate how we experimented in the field of sound I would like to talk about the impetus Kashmiri drama got with the introduction of the National Programme of Plays that was started by All India Radio around 1956. This too was conceived by J. C. Mathur (Jagdish Chandra Mathur I. C. S.). The idea was that the best plays selected from amongst the radio plays broadcast by different stations in their regional languages be translated first into either Hindi or English and then be circulated among all the stations of All India Radio, where they would be translated into their own regional language, and produced to be broadcast at 9.30 p.m. of every alternate Thursday which was fixed for it. This meant that the selected play would be simultaneously broadcast from all stations in different languages of the country on the same day and at the same time. This was an excellent idea. This gave people living in different parts of the country firsthand knowledge of what was being written in other languages. Thus, authors writing in one language were introduced to people and writers speaking and writing in other languages.

Another impetus for playwrights and producers was the introduction of an annual competition for the best radio play of the year called Akashvani Annual Award, which in fact was equal to a National Award, carrying a cash prize with a trophy for the producer, and a good remuneration to the writer, plus the additional royalty that he would get from every other station. It was a binding for the stations to get the award-winning play too translated and then broadcast. Besides this, Radio Kashmir Srinagar on its own, started

holding a drama festival ^{Digitized By eGangotri} once a year. During this festival we broadcast specially written and produced plays every night for a full fortnight at the 9.30 p.m. prime time slot. In this way Radio Kashmir Srinagar became a hub of dramatic activity. In this festival, half the plays were in Kashmiri and the other half in Urdu. Not only our listeners, but also our writers and actors would eagerly await this Festival. For participating in these festivals every one's remuneration would be doubled. In this way we started getting quality plays written and produced with professional competence. Many of these festival plays got selected even for the National Programme of Plays. The production of these Festival Plays was assigned to different Producers including our Programme Officers and even to Production Assistants. Although there was no official competition or a special prize, the spirit was always there, which helped us in getting quality productions.

Some of the outstanding plays that got written in this process that come to my mind while remembering those days are, *Adam Chu Ajab Zath*, *Sonder Ta Sardar*, *Mohamdoo Vald Lassoo*, by Akhtar Mohiudin; *Vji Vav*, *Vethi Heind Baeth Za*, *Kanka Manuet*, *Ajaib Khana*, *Yali Sangar Phoel* by Som Nath Zutsshi; *Kaend Sahrao Ta Vajood*, *Dara Apari*, *Suuya*, *Mahan*, *Gaddar*, *Myani Jigraki Daadi wouth*, *Speed Breaker*, *Rotul Ta Rooh*, by Ali Mohmmaad Lone; *Ajal*, *Daen Thear*, *Bus Akh Tammah*, *Akash Patal*, *Girdaab*, *Nav Vav Ta Deryav* by Basi Nirdosh; *Tchandave*, *Gili tooer*, *Aes Lukh*, *Molavun lal* by Hriday Kaul Bharti; *Harud*, *Woyen Kasenz Vayer*, *Nov Yaavun*, *Ba Kuh Chus*, *Basti Valith Brore*, by Dr. Shanker Raina; *Taent Kor*, *Shihul Naar*, *Keaj Raath Ta Gonahgar*, *Rata Kreel* by Sajood Sailani; *Aullad*, *Reh Ta Aab*, *Bad shah* by Autar Kishen Rehbar; *Lol Yeli Motas Phor*, *Dr. Faustus* by Rehman Rahi; *Tre Akh Tre*, *Laltaditya*, *Manzeal Nika*; by Moti Lal Kemmu, *Madanwar Ta Zuvalmal*, *Bomdur Yamberzal*, *Wyeth(Vitasta)*, and Scenes from Shakespeare By Dina Nath Nadim; *Bechi Katth*, by Sofi Ghulam Mohammad; *But Ta Bulldozer*, *Gata TA Gash*, *Gulrez* by Ghulam Rasool Santosh; *Quda Gojawore* by Mohini Kaul; *Chapath*, *Ba Chus Tiscoor* by Som Nath Sadhu;

College Paether, *Taseanz Qabar Kati Cheh*, by Farooq Masoodi; and *Zalur* by Bashir Dada; *Kaend Ta Tooer*, *Nyool Wozul*, *Suradag*, *Husun ta Havas*, by Amar Malmohi. There is a long list of other plays besides these which were written by younger writers like Yaqoob Dilkash, Ghulam Nabi Shahid and Bashir Shah. So the river of dramatic literature went on flowing with the tributaries of different forms enriching it with fresh ideas. Every writer would be keen to offer something new in content and I would try to make it as effective as possible by experimenting with the form, knowing the potential and strength of sound and word fully well. It was sometimes treading on a razor's edge knowing that we had our listeners of a somewhat conservative society.

Long before I had joined Radio Kashmir, I had heard a suspenseful play *Neeli Chhatree*, an adaptation of the Urdu novel of the same title written by Umar Majeed and his brother from Jammu. This play is probably the first successful sitcom broadcast serially from All India Radio, Delhi. It was produced by the great broadcaster, S. S. S. Thakur, who had set a record by modulating his voice and broadcast a monologue of an hour expressing the feelings and the reaction of a very old lady whose young son had laid down his life at the altar of his motherland. The past had resurged while watching the funeral procession of Mahatma Gandhi. Thakur Sahab, as S.S.S. Thakur was addressed by his artists and the staff of All India Radio had through his innovation created the tension in the novel so successfully that you got carried to a world of mystery and suspense. That serial play had got so deeply embedded in my mind that I literarily craved broadcasting such a series when on going to Radio Kashmir.

S.S.S. Thakur was deeply depressed and disappointed because of certain events when I met him but later became my friend. He was shattered seeing professionalism getting sculled in All India Radio. It was the time when we were fighting for the rights of staff artists of All India Radio. He had been elected President of the All India Radio Staff Artists Association and I the Vice President. So we would interact quite often. That was how we got closer. He was

so disillusioned by the manipulations in the bureaucracy that had taken over the organization that he almost stopped working. Generalists were being elevated and professionals were being pushed aside as still happens in our government institutions. But thank God such a frustration did not overcome me as I was determined to create a space of my own with dedication to my craft and hard work. And when I look back, I feel proud that I did not fail my listeners. That is why they still remember and respect me. It was their encouragement and the patronage of station directors like P. C. Chatterji, P. S. Bhatia, H. R. Luthra, A. L. Maini and Nand Lal Chawla, that not only guided me but also gave me the freedom to plan my programmes. It was the trust that they reposed in me that led me to create challenging and ambitious programmes.

Now I come back to my strong urge to plan serials both in Kashmiri and Urdu. While thinking about the themes that could be tried, the long interview with the Sufiana Ustad Abdul Khaliq Butt mentioned earlier in this text, came to my mind, especially the portion pertaining to 'Begaar'. That took me to our past. How torturous our past was, of which our younger generation was completely ignorant. They thought that our life was always as comfortable as it appeared. So, I wanted to go to the past not past of hundreds of years but the one about which Ustad Abdul Khaliq Butt had talked of. So I wanted to share this idea with my friends in the field before embarking on such a project. That is why I invited Ali Mohammad Lone, who had left Radio Kashmir by then and was now working in the state cultural academy with Akhtar Mohiudin and Som Nath Zutshi for discussion on this subject because our wavelengths matched. They liked the idea and it was decided after a few more meetings that I should try an experiment in which all the three of them would join hands, to start with, a serial of four plays, each of 60 minutes duration under the title *Do Vyeth Rooz Pakan (and the Vitasta Flowered On)*. The first play was assigned to Akhtar Mohiudin, the second to Ali Mohammad Lone, the third one to Som Nath Zutshi and the fourth one again to Ali

Mohammad Lone.

So we started with Akhtar Mohiuddin's play. He created the air of the social structure during the period in the late eighteenth century when the Dogra Governor Wazir Punu was the virtual ruler of Kashmir who had introduced the treacherous law of '*Dagh Shali*' which had made the life of *shawl bafts* (the weavers of *Pashmina shawls*), miserable, and reduced those skilled weavers to the level of bonded labourers. The suppression was so intense that they were forced to cut their own thumbs in order to change their profession. The apathy of rulers drove them to revolt. This caused greater brutal suppression and increased physical torture. Though the characters and the story-line of the first episode was not the same in the next episode, the theme continued spinning on the same thread in it and thereafter in the third as well as the fourth episode.

In the second episode, Ali Mohammad Lone dealt with highly deplorable times when hundreds and hundreds of young men mostly from the villages were driven like cattle on *begaar* (forced labour) with heavy loads of rations for the Dogra soldiers guarding the northern borders of *Gilgit* and *Nagar Honza*. It was like driving them into the jaws of death, fighting blizzards and facing almost fatal avalanches. This play effectively highlighted the miserable plight of Dogra soldiers also who drew these hapless peasants, who were given just a handful of parched maize or rice to survive, with no wages. Hundreds of these helpless labourers perished, and those who returned kept hiding lest they would again be caught and sent on the next expedition.

The third episode too carried forward the thread of the theme and narrated the period starting with the death of Maharaja Ranbir Singh. The astrologers, after doing their mumbo jumbo broodings and calculations declared to the new king that the *Atma* (soul) of the deceased Maharaja had entered the body of a fish and that in this form he would remain for a year. After the first year his soul would transmigrate and rest in *Swarg* (heaven) and then be at peace. So, a proclamation was made that no one dare catch fish for a full year. Besides this forbidding of fishing, instructions were issued

that there should be as little disturbance as possible in the waters of the Dal lake and the river *Vitasta* for one year. The drama that followed and the suffering that was inflicted upon the people was presented powerfully in this episode.

The fourth episode was in fact a corollary to the happenings of the second and highlighted through flashbacks the resolution of the conflict in the series. It started in the present times. A grand festival had been organised, in which awards in the form of *Tamra Patras* (copper plaques) are being presented to those who had fought for the freedom of the country. One of the nominees was a labourer from the last batch, who had been sent on forced labour to the northern borders and had luckily survived a snowstorm, in which many of his fellow men had died. He, a rebel by nature, who had gone through hell had joined the freedom struggle after his return and had also been imprisoned. That was why he too had been nominated for this award. He is sitting quietly in the crowd, escorted by his son while his somewhat long citation is being read. When the portion of *begaar* in the citation comes up, his past comes back to him. Here the narrative of the play goes into flashback mode.

Tired and exhausted, the hungry labourers caught in an avalanche rise in revolt. They try to tear a sack of rations open and beat the soldiers who try to stop them. The officer in command opens fire in which a couple of labourers who were leading the revolt get killed. The protagonist in this episode gets a shudder when his name is announced. He rises and hurriedly walks away and his son runs after him. His name is repeatedly announced but he does not stop and runs away from the gathering. His name keeps on reverberating and fades out when he reaches a park and sits down with his eyes closed. His son asks him as to why he had run away and not gone to receive the Award. He keeps on shaking his head and talks incoherently to himself. "No! No!! No!!! The real freedom fighters were they, those two martyrs who faced the bullets there in the mountains of Gilgit, not me, not me!"

A complete play in itself, *Tamra Patra* was so powerfully produced that it won national recognition by winning me the

prestigious Akashvani Annual Award for the production of this play. To build the atmosphere and action through the medium of sound in this series, particularly the last episode, was a tremendous challenge and how this challenge was met shall be mentioned later on when I shall write what a great impact sound can have when used imaginatively. At present we are talking about the serials that had become very popular.

Another subject that intrigued me was the problem of the landless peasants called '*nan gaars*' in Kashmiri. Kashmir is the only state in our country where immediately after Independence land was given free to tillers whose generation after generation had kept tilling the land of big landlords for a pittance. As the tables had been turned, it was interesting to watch how their attitude towards life and behaviour in society changed once they got ownership of the land. I was shocked by the experience myself and shared it with my friend and close associate in my creativity Ali Mohammad Lone. One of my ardent fans was a very well to do orchard owner of the Sopore area on the road to Nowgam, which had got the nick name *Chhota London*, because of its rapid growth and affluence. He used to write me letters invariably after the broadcast of our plays with his critical appreciation. And I used to include them in the programme *Khat Ke Liye Shukriya* in which I replied to listeners' letters. I would quite often invite those listeners whose letters had enough substance to participate in person. So we had met personally too in this programme. He would invariably and quite affectionately invite me to visit his village and his orchards. I would thank him and promise that I would try, but could never make it.

We had planned a long series of radio documentaries on the life of the people living in the extreme border areas of our state and their relationship with the security forces posted there. The team comprising the veteran journalist, Sat Pal Sahni whom we had commissioned for collecting material and to take photographs, the Station Director A. L. Maini, recording engineer Moti Lal Kaul and I, the Producer of the series were in for a unique experience.

As luck would have it we passed through Sopore and 'Chhota London' on our road to the *Matchal* valley in the north of Kashmir. While passing through the long row of apple orchards, I suddenly remembered my friend. I had his calling card too with me. So, after a couple of enquiries, we reached his big orchard.

It was the apple-picking season and his orchard was abuzz with activity. Fruit was being harvested, graded and then packed in boxes to be shipped to different markets of the country and even exported. My friend, seeing us enter the gate, rushed to greet us and led us to a shaded grove where a carpet was spread on a *dewan*, from where he was supervising the operations. Tea was ordered and instantly brought along with a big tray in which a very expensive tea set and plates were beautifully displayed. Another tray followed with dry fruit and Kashmiri *nans and kababs*. He kept expressing gratitude for our visit, while tea was being poured and savouries offered. As he was talking to us, his eyes kept on moving to the fruit pickers, some distance away. I watched this but attributed it to a businessman's concern, when he suddenly jumped down the *dewan* and rushed towards one of the apple trees loudly cursing like mad.

We turned to the sight. An old man had fallen on the ground struggling to free himself from the frail wooden ladder that had given way and had fallen upon him. Seeing his master rushing towards him he pushed the ladder aside and hurriedly started collecting apples that had fallen with him. My fan, without listening to him, pulled up the old man and started beating and rebuking him. "You bloody wretch! Don't you realize what you have done? A full two box worth of apples have been damaged. Will your dead father rise from the grave and pay for it, who couldn't leave you even a penny to purchase his shroud when he died?" The old man got infuriated and shouted back, "You dare not take my father's name. Deduct the loss from my payment!" His master now couldn't control himself and pounced on him. Meanwhile the other labourers had left their work and gathered there. They tried to mediate and pulled the old man aside but he, trembling in rage, shouted back, "Have you forgotten that your father too was a landless labourer

like my father? The whole village knows how he sold in marriage his brother's widow, to that old hag of a Patwari and got the revenue records changed and grabbed this land, while we got only that measly stretch of land we used to till. Go and ask your father! Isn't he still living? Go and ask him, you great orchardist!" Other labourers dragged him away. This rebuttal had silenced our friend. We were getting late and wanted to avoid subsequent awkward developments. So we excused ourselves and left.

When I narrated this incident to Ali Mohammad Lone he was inspired and the result was the landmark serial *Lala Joo & Sons*. The main theme of the series was based on this incident. But it had covered the story of the life and behaviour of this orchardist vis-a-vis his family and his sons when he grew old and they grew up as young men. This series too became very popular and has been repeated quite a few times. But I used my experience in that orchard in *Chhota London* later on in my well known novel *Gul Gulshan Gulfam* and quite effectively in the television serial based on it.

Being always in search of themes and stories, I was attracted by the comics for children, *Vikram Vetal* that had become very popular then. This drove me to read *Katha Sarit Sagar* afresh, of which *Vetal Pacheesi* is just a small portion. In the comics *Vetal* had been depicted as some sort of a phantom. Ali Mohammad Lone too had studied *Katha Sarit Sagar* even before I had suggested that we should try to adapt stories from it. That is why I suggested to him that we should first try *Vetal Pachisi* which had a continuous link. Once we decided to plan its broadcast we both analysed the psyche of the two main characters Raja *Vikram* and *Vetal*. We both came to the conclusion that *Vetal* was not a phantom or a ghost. He, in fact, represents all knowledge and that is why the *Aghoori* (hermits of the cremation ground) catches Raja *Vikram* to somehow bring *Vetal* to him so that he would suck out all the wisdom he had. And this misconception too had to be cleared that Raja *Vikram* in these stories is not *Vikramaditya* of the *Moriya* dynasty. He must have been a king of Kashmir when the original writer of *Brehat Katha*,

Gunadya wrote it in the people's language which Soma Deva translated into Sanskrit under the title *Katha Sarit Sagar* nearly two hundred years later. To present a different kind of atmosphere, I created special sound effects and got music specially composed to enhance the effectiveness of the dramatic elements in the serial.

This serial became so popular that people started greeting friends imitating *Vetal's* peculiar style of address, while inviting Raja Vikram's attention "*Rrraaza!!*" Both Lone Sahib and I later had a unique experience. The State Cultural Academy had organised district level stage Drama Festivals and both of us were requested to be the judges. The District Pulwama Festival was held in a vast field in the village of Pulwama. People from adjacent villages had gathered there to watch the plays. It was dusk when we reached. So we were led through a side alley to our seats. Word had spread that Pran Kishore and Ali Mohammad Lone had come from Srinagar and were sitting there. Before the start of the show a loud voice rose from somewhere in the back, "*Raaza Vikram Vaniv Warai Chiva*". This was joined by another and then a chorus. The crowd, turning restive, pressed forward and almost reached us. The organizers requested us to go on to the stage and satisfy their curiosity. Seeing that there was no way out, we went on to the stage, and from here when we were introduced, the entire crowd greeted us with thunderous applause. Waving at them we started moving down, but the crowd did not allow us to step down from the stage unless I would deliver a couple of dialogues and utter the punch line "*Raaza Vaniv, Vaniv Raaza*," That was the popularity of "*Vetal Pachisi*". Its recording, along with other plays, has been preserved in the archives. It is still broadcast, especially during the dreary months of winter when life gets pushed indoors.

Another very popular serial was the famous humorous series *Machama*. Based on the misadventures of the central character *Machama*, it was written by our great humorist Pushkar Bhan. This series continued for quite a few years, and when these radio plays were published in a book form under the title, "*Hero Machama*", it was selected for the coveted Sahitya Akademi Award. There was a

protest from some quarters that as the category of Radio Plays had not been accepted as literature anywhere in the world, then why this deviation? But the advisory committee for Kashmiri language retorted that the main play, "*Hero Machama*", had been included in its stage form, so the opinion of the reviewers, had been accepted. I personally consider "*Hero Machama*" and *Sindbad Machama* the best of the series. It was I who had motivated Pushkar Bhan to adapt *Hero Machama* for the stage which he did and I directed it for a festival of wit and humour organised by Akashvani Club and held in Tagore Hall, Srinagar. It was a great success on stage too. The same stage version was later on serialized by a private producer for television too. But it did not have the same impact that the stage version had. The credit for the success of the *Machama* series over Radio Kashmir Srinagar, goes to Pushkar Bhan who himself played the role of the hero, his wife *Khatji*, Som Nath Sadhu and Mohammad Sultan Pundit who played *Machama's* chums, *Sulagota and Rehman Dadda*, wife Shanta Kaul and finally the veteran old time stage actor, Jagar Nath Saqi as his father. *Sindbad Machama* too took listeners by storm.

As confessed earlier, my stress was on building Kashmiri drama on a sound footing so that it could compete with other regional languages like Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati, Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam, which had far more developed dramatic literature and solid theatre movements than us. But at the same time, we made serious efforts to broaden the spectrum of Urdu playwrights too. The first step in this direction was to motivate those of our writers who wrote basically in Urdu, especially those who wrote short stories. Prem Nath Pardesi, Ali Mohammad Lone and Arjun Dev Rashk had already laid the foundation. Bashir Butt too had written a couple of short duration plays when he held charge of the Drama Section before me. It was during his tenure that I too had adapted R. L. Stevenson's famous short story, 'Markheim.' It was one of my best productions and best acted plays. The story has three characters, the curio dealer, Markheim the tramp, who, to make both ends meet, keeps on mortgaging whatever he steals, to this old curio

dealer whom he kills when he is alone in his shop to steal his cash. And in that turmoil, his inner self awakens and confronts him till the salesgirl returns and he tells her to call the police. I had played all the three characters modulating my voice to match the timbre of the imagined voices of these characters. Training my vocal chords to suit the character had been my passion and I tried to develop that in the actors too who were working with me. The voice is everything in broadcasting, a character's age, his make-up, his costume, everything.

When we auditioned artists who wanted to become radio actors we would specify in the audition sheet the actual age of the actor and his "voice age". That was there to keep a record as to what age the voice of the actor would suit, whatever his or her actual age was, while casting for a play. After getting through the audition it was the actor's duty to get acquainted with the characteristics of different types of microphones we used those days in the studios. The three types of microphones we had were omni-directional, bi-directional and multi-directional. The first one would catch a voice only from one side and was used mostly for announcements; bidirectional, which had two sides dead and two sides live, was mostly used for broadcasting plays, and the third one that was multi directional for discussions where we had more people. We used the two dead sides of the bidirectional microphones to create perspectives in voice. That means that a character, while talking is going away it should create that impression in the mind of the listener that he is walking away. This perspective is created by the actor moving a little to the dead side, while talking and he has not actually to walk away.

I am here reminded of a funny situation that Bashir Butt and I came across in All India Radio, Jalandhar where we both had been transferred. The laughable situation that I am going to narrate was witnessed by us when we were quite new to the place. We were returning to the studios after our lunch break, when we saw a small crowd assembled in the lawns near a big tree. Walking closer, we saw a microphone fixed on a tall stand some distance away from

the tree. A portable tape recorder was installed on a table and the recording engineer was adjusting the level of the sound. One of the senior most programme officers was sitting nearby with headphones on giving commands. He shouted, "Tek Chand! Move up. Dontworry! The tree is strong. Yes that is alright. Now deliver the dialogue." We were intrigued and looked at the tree and saw the old stage actor, Tek Chand, with a script in his hand up in the tree, almost dangling from a branch delivering his dialogue. The sound engineer whispered something to the officer who almost yelled at poor Tek Chand, "What has happened to you Tek Chand? Talk louder! No, no, don't move! Come on. It must sound that you are speaking stuck in a tree. Now come on, speak!" The poor old man kept shouting his dialogue out. I whispered to Bashir, "*Yaar yeh kya film ki shooting chal rahi hai?*" He bade me keep quiet and watch the fun. The officer got up in disgust and turned to the recording engineer, "There is something wrong with your mike. I am not getting the effect I want." We rushed to our room suppressing our laughter.

When we entered our room we saw some staff members from the other room, huddled near the windows in our room overlooking the lawns outside, watching the fun and laughing. It was from them that we came to know that this scene was for a play, the officer had specially written which he himself wanted to produce. We were really amused. What a great idea of creating the sound perspective! It is a different thing that the play was finally produced by Sardar Harbans Singh Bedi, Producer Drama there. Such dominance of non professional and generalists in the organisation was the cause of the deterioration in programmes in this organisation. These very people later on dominated in Doordarshan too. There are many such examples even in other departments of the government. Generalists are the planners and supervisors of highly technical projects even now in the 21st century in our country.

We return now to Radio Kashmir Srinagar and its efforts to develop radio drama in Urdu. As fifty percent of the plays had to be broadcast in Urdu, dearth of playwrights in this language too

was a big problem as has been mentioned earlier. But it too was solved by motivating and guiding Urdu writers of fiction to try their hand at radio play-scripting. We in the organisation had laid the foundation, so the models were there. As the local problems of the masses could best be tackled in their own language, we had to be more cautious in keeping the sensibilities of the local population in mind, while planning plays in Urdu. That was why we started with adaptations of selected themes from world literature. Authors like Maupassant, O Henry, Galsworthy, Ibsen, Gorky, Thomas Hardy, Chekov, Moliere, and others gave us enough material which had universal appeal. Some of them were adapted in a way that they did not sound alien. Thus, our writers of Urdu plays too were initiated into writing plays on the challenges that modern man and society were confronting in our milieu. The Urdu writers who accepted the challenge were Ali Mohammad Lone, Noor Shah, Hamidi Kashmiri, Amar Malmohi, Shabnam Qayoom, Afaaq Ahmad, Dr. Shakil-u- Rehman, Umesh Kaul, Bashir Shah, Hriday Kaul Bharti and others. Sajood Sailani and Bansi Nirdosh too contributed whenever requested to help.

As the serials in the Kashmiri language had become popular I thought it would be worthwhile to try the experiment in Urdu too. Keeping in view the speed with which Dr. Shakil-ul- Rehman churned out script after script (though all of them did not come up to the listeners' expectations) I thought he would be able to meet the target of writing an episode a week. He was happy to take up the assignment. We both, after due deliberations decided to start with the well known English novel 'Return of the Native' by Thomas Hardy under the title *Us Ki Wapsi* in Urdu. This was followed by Thomas Moore's *In The Land of Lala Rukh*, once again adapted by Dr. Shakil -U-Rehman. Next was Turgenev's *July Showers* very beautifully adapted and written by Ali Mohammad Lone with the title '*Bahaar Ke Jhonke*'. It was in this manner that we built a solid radio drama movement in Kashmir. This development had been prominently mentioned by none other than the great broadcaster P.C. Chatterji, who retired as the last Director

General of All India Radio and Doordarshan (combined), and also by other veterans like H.R. Luthra and N. L. Chawla in their books and memoirs written on broadcasting in India.

The long years that I spent as Head of the Drama Department gave me ample time and freedom to experiment and innovate. This helped me meet many challenges even there where my production team would frustrate me with their helplessness in achieving the required effect that the script and I demanded. For instance, in the fourth episode of "*Ta Vyeth Rooz Pakan*," there is a scene, in which a convoy of forced labourers carrying heavy loads on their backs is caught in a blizzard. While passing through a gorge between lofty mountains on their journey to Gilgit a huge avalanche breaks out and coming down, rolls over a complete wing of the labourers with it, and vanishes in the fathomless depths below.

I had, while recording for my Radio Documentary on the snow clearing operations at Zojila, (essential to clear the Srinagar Leh road buried under more than forty feet of snow after winter), recorded the sound of the real breaking of an avalanche. But when I had played it back in the studio, the result was terribly disappointing. It sounded as if some loads had slipped down from a truck or from some height. So this real effect of an actual avalanche would by no stretch of imagination create the horror of that earth shaking tragedy. In spite of adding some echoes, the required effect could not be created. So, I told my assistants that we shall have to create the effect mechanically. We therefore sat to rack our brains how to go about it. I suddenly remembered that we had recorded the display of side drums in the "Beating the Retreat" on a Republican Day parade in the Northern Command at Udampur. We played it back. It had the rumbling effect and some echo of the mountains around. But it lacked the effect of horror. I was suddenly reminded that the speed of a tape recorder depended on the thickness of its capstan. In order to replace these worn out gadgets our engineer Ghulam Mohiudin, an excellent technician, had got a series of brass capstans of different sizes made to precision by the well known gun makers Shora & Sons. So, with the co-

operation of the associated engineer, for the speed of the playback deck more than halved by using a thicker capstan and after that

played back the recording of the side drums in reverse. The result was amazing. It was because of the environment that we had created and the strength of the sound created in the production of "*Ta Vyeth Rooz Pakan*", that it got the National Award, Akashvani Annual Award, 1978.

While writing about my experiments with sound and sound effects I am reminded of another play that I was assigned to produce for the National Programme of Plays of All India Radio. It was the Hindi adaptation of the famous Telugu writer Sri Sri's short story, "Anant Yatra". The story goes like this: A professor of Philosophy and two girls are travelling in a train. The professor looks at his watch that had suddenly stopped at 6 o'clock. He asks one of the girls the time by her watch. The girl looks at her watch and finds it stopped. The professor, annoyed, asks her the time. The girl equally annoyed says, "It has stopped at six sir!" The professor, losing his cool, asks the other girl, "What is it by your watch?" "Wait a minute sir. It is in my bag." She opens the bag and takes out the watch. At that very moment the train they are travelling in meets with an accident, in which the professor dies, but the girls escape with some injuries.

From this point the story revolves around the soul of the professor. It roams restlessly to find out whether the watch of the second girl too had stopped at six o'clock. His soul follows the girls wherever they go. They are getting tired of narrating the trauma they had gone through in the tragic train accident. And when the second girl starts talking about her watch a distraction comes up. At no stage is the girl able to say whether her watch too had stopped at six o'clock or not. The professor gets frustrated. Many interesting situations arise which expose the baseness of man and drives the professor's soul to forget about this world and travel to the other world and the world of babies in queues to be born. He encounters one of them, fed on the stories of the beauty of the world to where it was lucky to enter. The professor's soul tries to dissuade this

baby, still in the womb of the mother and narrates what tortures it will have to face once it opens its eyes in this horrible world full of disease, greed, jealousy, hunger and hardships that make life miserable.

It was again a great challenge. How could we create the voice of a baby still in the womb of a mother? We first tried by changing the speed of the tape recorder. But it resulted in the tone of some characters in cartoon films. Even the thickest capstan could not improve the speed to make the voice the thinnest as possible and at the same time soft but clear. The female artist I had selected for the baby in the womb was the versatile Uma Khosla. God bless her soul! I made her drag her voice while recording, as we shoot a scene in a film in slow motion. Instead of recording her through the echo chamber, I made her speak in the earthen pitcher we use in the *chhakri* programmes as a percussion instrument. After increasing her voice's speed to the optimum and mixing it with the music on the vibraphone we achieved the result which enthralled everyone, especially the jury for Akashvani Awards. Another effect that was highly appreciated was the repetitive echo, the ticking of a clock to establish indivisibility of time that was created by a single stroke on the 'Zira' (the right half of the tabla). It was a unique experiment at that time looking at the technical facilities we then had.

It was in the beginning very difficult to control the pitch of my voice and mould it to suit the sensitivity of the microphone, as I had come from theatre to broadcasting. Once I succeeded in the effort my job was to train the actors too to follow, till they got trained to modulate their voice to suit the character they were playing. As most of them too came from different amateur drama troupes, it was an uphill task to harness their talent to suit the idiom of broadcasting. Even our talkers tended to be orators rather than talkers. They too were made to understand the difference between a speech and the spoken word. Now, after training a reasonably big contingent of radio playwrights and radio actors we set out to create an honourable standard of production of our plays, both, in

Kashmiri, and Urdu.

Assessing the qualities of our plays that we would send for different competitions and festivals of All India Radio I was assigned the production of quite a few plays for the National Programme of Plays in Hindi. Here it won't be out of place to mention that Radio Kashmir Srinagar was categorized as a non Hindi station as many other regional stations. This honour to produce a play in Hindi for the national hook up was not given to any other non Hindi station. For this, I give full credit to my production team led by Kedar Sharma and Moti Lal Kachroo also. The credit must go to well known Hindi poet and author, Mohan Lal Nirash, Editor Translation, too, whose Hindi translations kept the spirit and flavour of the original intact. It was achieved because of his command over both Kashmiri as well as Hindi. My heart bled when I came to know that after his retirement his body was found in a mortuary in Delhi after many days' search. He had settled there and was living with his son. It was probably a hit and run accident by some car. His death also remained a mystery like that of Ghulam Nabi Sheikh. After Mohan Lal Nirash's promotion to a senior position, this job was taken over by Abdal Ahmad Mehjoor, the grandson of Poet Laureate of Kashmir, Ghulam Ahmed Mehjoor. The job of the Editor Translator was not only to translate Kashmiri scripts into Hindi, but also to translate the scripts of plays that were being selected from other regional languages for the National Programme into Kashmiri which were broadcast every alternate Thursday at 9.30 p.m. In this way, the number of plays that were broadcast from Radio Kashmir Srinagar would be one hundred and twenty five on an average per year.

The introduction of the National Programmes of Music, Plays and Feature, was a great idea. It gave a countrywide forum to our artists, writers, producers, and musicians to reach lakhs of listeners simultaneously at a time. Thereby the entire country was brought together through the medium of sound. It created an atmosphere for the artists, musicians and writers of one region to get acquainted with the creative personalities of other regions. Such cultural

exchanges, though not having been properly evaluated and publicized, have played such an important role in fostering national integration of our country which no political movement could do. As far as the literary quality of the hundreds of plays that I had the honour of producing and directing for broadcast is concerned, I dare say, that at least twenty five percent of them, especially those in the Kashmiri language, if edited to suit the print media will form a big chunk of excellent drama literature. That being my opinion, we got volumes and volumes of selected plays secured in hard bind. I hope they are still there. This idea worked for talks too and in this way we were able to build a scripts library. I have been informed by some old colleagues that there have been some pilferages and some scripts have been sold to Doordarshan from these volumes under different titles. Even the names of the original authors who were no more there had been changed. This may be hearsay and I hope it is not true. I wish these plays are some day printed in book form. Even if they are printed in the radio play format they will make interesting reading.

The scripts that I would put in the category of outstanding plays are Ali Mohammad Lone's, *Mahaan*, *Kaend Saehrao Ta Wajood and Myani Jigraki Dadi woth*, Som Nath Zutshi's, *Vethi Heand Baeth Za*, *Viji Wav*, *Gulnaar* and *Yali Sangar pholeiy*, Sajood Sailani's, *Taent Kor*, *Kaej Rath Ta Gonahgar and Shuhul Naar*, Dr. Shankar Raina's *Harud*, *Woyen Kas Seanz Wayer*, *Bast Valith Brore and Nov Yavun*, Akhtar Mohiudin's *Aadam Chu Ajab Zath*, *Mohamdoo Vald Lassoo' and NastI Hund Sawal*. Bansi Nirdosh's *Daen Thear*, *Akash Patal and Naav Waav Ta Deryav*, Avtaar Krishen Rehbar's *Aulad*, *Badshah and Reh Ta Aab Farooq Masoodi's Tassez Qaber Kati Chha* and *College Paither* Hriday Kaul Bharti's *Tchandav*, *Gili Tooer and Aes Awaam*, Amar Malmohi's *Madanvar Ta Zuval Mal* Som Nath Sadhu's *Chapath and Bu Chus tchoor*, Moti Lal Kemu's, *Tre Akh Tre*, *Manzil Nika Sheen ta Sangistan* Hari Krishan Kaul's *Yali Watan Khur Chu Yivan*, *Dastar Mohammad Subhan Bhagat's Taqdeer* and the traditional *Bhanda Paethers* with modern content, Ghulam Rasool Santosh's *But Ta*

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Bulldozer, Gata ta Gaash, Amin Kamil's Taem More Gagur, Aernimaal.

Besides the large number of plays in Kashmiri we introduced verse plays and operas too. The most popular amongst them were, *Dr. Faustus* and *Lol Yali Motas Phor* by Prof. Rehman Rahi; *Bombur Yemberzal, Vitasta*, and *Shihul Kul* by Dina Nath Nadim, *Soen Keser and Bombur ta Lolarey* by Amin Kamil, *Gul Rez* by Ghulam Rasool Santosh. It will not be out of place to mention here that Dina Nath Nadim's operas, *Bombu Ta Yamberzal* and *Vitasta* were also staged with great success.

As already mentioned, Radio Kashmir Srinagar was probably the first station to have planned a series of plays written by three different popular playwrights, Ali Mohammad Lone, Som Nath Zutshi, and Akhtar Mohiudin. Interconnected as far as the story line and treatment of the historical saga the series covered, the series was conceived under the title *Ta Vyeth Rooz Pakan (And the River Vitasta Kept Flowing)*. Two other popular serials were *Lala Joo & Sons* and *Vetal Pacheesi*. These have already been discussed. Another ambitious series that I wanted to experiment with was to serialize the large number of *Masnavis* we had in the Kashmiri language. The purpose was to project the beauty of the poetry of these masterpieces of literature. The stories they had woven were either from folklore like *Aka Nandun* and *Heemal Nagrai* or borrowed from Persian literature like *Gulrez* and *Gul Baqavali*. I must record here a very genuine young writer Shafi Shafai who undertook this laborious task. Laborious, because he had to first go through these long *masnavis* and then select portions for dramatization and continuity. He did it efficiently and continued it till his sad demise in the prime of his youth.

Though I was not directly connected with the Music Section the entire staff of Radio Kashmir Srinagar at that time was like a family which would take interest in whatever was planned by other sections too. While talking about the presentation of the Kashmiri *masnavis* I am reminded of the genre of *Dastangos* we used to have in our villages who would be basically story tellers. They

an important member of the fraternity of drama artists. She would be at ease in playing a nagging mother-in-law, a vindictive woman as well as a soft and affectionate mother. Nabla Begum, another school teacher, also belonging to a traditional Kashmiri family joined much later than Sajida Begum. She did not participate in a large number of radio productions alone, but also in a number of stage plays. But her first love was radio. She would always say that her acting school was the Drama section of Radio Kashmir. I even cast her for my maiden directorial venture, the feature film "Maenzi Rath". During my tenure in Radio Kashmir she acted in Bashir Badgami's TV film on the life of the poet Queen Habba Khatoon too. The third stalwart was Maryam Begum although she was initially an anchor of the Women's Programme in Kashmiri. But she had been auditioned for acting in plays too. That is why she became an integral part of Zoonadab as Agha Bai. But even being busy with this daily programme she would gladly come forward whenever I needed her for a play.

In addition to these dedicated artists one of the most versatile woman artists was Brij Kishori. A tigress of an actor Brij Kishori was an officer in the Accountant General's office. She was a versatile actor who could carry off the most difficult role with adorable ease. She was as effective on radio as on stage and later on in television productions too. Self made, Brij Kishori had the confidence and the spirit to fight for a cause which very few women of her age and her time could have.

Then there emerged two stalwarts of the old theatre who left a stamp of individuality of style on their performances in scores of plays in which they acted. They were Jaggan Nath Saqi and Sudama Ji Kaul. It was a difficult task to harness them and make them conscious that it was the microphone they were facing and not a live audience in some hall. Saqi would be louder than Sudamaji, perhaps because of his individual character. Saqi had a very colourful past and thus a flamboyant streak in everything he did, his walk, his talk and his behaviour with his colleagues. On the other hand, Sudamaji was sober, rather genteel and mild. When I

would tell this to Jaggar Nath Saqi, he would light-heartedly say, "It was because Sudamaji had played quite a few women characters in his young days on stage. That is why he is so soft-spoken."

Jaggar Nath Saqi was a remarkable character. That is why I am tempted to dedicate a little more space to him. I remember my days as a teenager. He was notorious and avoided by many because of his misadventures. Therefore it created a scare in our young minds. He was off the scene after 1947 for quite some time. When he appeared again on the scene, one day he barged into our office and asked us as to where he had to be seated. We looked confused but soon came to know that P.S. Bhatia, the Station Director had received a call from Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad's office who was the then Prime Minister of Jammu And Kashmir, that this man Jaggar Nath Saqi should be absorbed within the organisation. There were some apprehensions in our minds because of the aura that his name carried with it. It was Bakhshi Sahib's order and who could defy it? So, Jaggar Nath Saqi became part of Radio Kashmir Srinagar. He had a unique tact of winning friends due to which he became one of us in spite of his age.

A man of some great qualities and commendable talent, he first became one of the stock characters of our rural programmes. I was fascinated by the timbre of his voice and roped him in to play roles like the *Afreed* in the dramatization of the opera *Gulrez* and other powerful characters. He became a household name after he worked in Pushkar Bhan's famous *Machama* series and *Zoonadab*. He, as the greedy father of *Machama* and the *Jagger Pension* of *Zoonadab* became as popular as the other characters of these programmes. I saw what a powerful performance he could give when I directed him in the stage version of *Hero Machama*. This prompted me to include him in the cast of the feature film *Shair-e-Kashmir Mehjoor* in which he played the role of a poor peasant who to appease the village's *Peer Sahib*, steals a fat rooster and offers it as a '*nazrana*' to him to get a '*fatwa*' in his favour. Though a brief sequence in the movie, it established what wonderful film actor he could have been.

I am tempted to include two interesting episodes which have

kept Jaggar Nath Saqi still alive and kicking in my mind. He had occupied through his tact a two room hut of the public works department just in a corner of the Emporium Garden opposite the old Radio Station building in the Polo Ground, without paying rent. After quite a few years the Public Works Department sent him a bill of quite a few thousands with a notice to pay immediately and vacate the hut. When he showed the bill to us we got concerned about his plight. But, he, in his usual carefree way remarked in his typical anglicized accent, "Never mind! Saqi is SAQI, Let us see what he does." Saying this he broke into laughter.

Saqi's hut had a small patch of land in which he had sown some pumpkin seeds. One of the seeds had grown into a long and healthy creeper which had borne a couple of big pumpkins resting on the roof of his hut. One Sunday morning he cut the bigger pumpkin and carried it to Bakhshi Sahib's official residence across the Polo Ground and straight away entered and offered it to Bakhshi Sahib's wife who knew him as they had been Saqi's sister's neighbours in the old city. He very humbly told her he had brought it as Maulad Sharif was just a few days away. "Pumpkin stew and honey was Prophet Sahib's favourite dish. It is his birthday and you invariably cook it on that auspicious day." Saqi narrated all this in his typical style. "And lo and behold, Bakhshi Sahib entered the room while I was talking to Begum Sahiba. I got up to pay my respects. Before he could say anything Begum Sahiba pointed to the big pumpkin I had brought and told Bakhshi Sahib that I had brought it for him. Bakhshi Sahib was Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad. Saqi could swindle the shrewdest but not him. He threw a probing look at me and then turned to his wife and asked, 'And what did he ask for it, in return?' I got a shiver. Begum Sahiba was about to say something but Bakhshi Sahib stopped her with a gesture of his hand and now with a mischievous smile, asked me, 'Open up, you trickster, what is your plan?' I immediately took out the notice of the P. W.D. from the pocket of my *phiran* and handed it over to him bringing a tremor to my hand. Bakhshi Sahib sternly bade me to stop acting and say what I wanted to say. With my

hands folded I said 'Sir, you remember taking pity on me you were kind enough to give me that small hut in that corner of the Emporium Garden complex to spend my old age days and see, they have sent me this bill of fifteen thousand rupees.' Bakhshi Sahib said, 'I don't remember when I allotted it to you.' 'Three years ago when you saw me shivering under the *chinar*, when it was raining.' Bakhshi Sahib tried to remember but Begum Sahiba, God give her long life, came to my rescue and told her husband 'Now don't hold a court. He won't lie. From where will this poor man get such a big sum? Waive it off, please in the name of Allah!' Bakhshi Sahib took out his pen and wrote a note on the bill. And when I went to the P.W.D. office they gave me a letter saying that the Hon'ble Prime Minister had waived off the dues of the rent I owed the department." Needless to say, Saqi lived in that hut till his last without rent.

In spite of all his idiosyncrasies and pranks, I had great admiration for Saqi's passion for acting. I can never forget a sequence of events that reflects this passion of his. I had assigned the role of the protagonist of Akhtar Mohi-u-din's play *Aadam Chu Ajab Zaath* to him. It is the story of this old boatman whose son is lost to him consuming himself in his mad love for the Dal Lake in which he was born and brought up. Saqi had lived the role to a tee, and was very happy for it. After a few months this play was selected for the National Programme of plays by All India Radio and its production too was assigned to me. Saqi had meanwhile fallen ill. But he beseeched me that for the Hindi version too he should be given a chance to act as he had lived this character in the original Kashmiri. I was a little hesitant because of his accent. He would not let me go and said, "Sir you made me act on stage. When I asked for a role in a feature film, you obliged me. I did not disappoint you. I am now left with only one desire that my voice should resound in the entire country." I had to yield and he got the role. The rehearsals went on well for a couple of days. But then Saqi's health deteriorated. He had got an attack of asthma. My assistants advised me that we still had time and should replace

him. But I did not have the heart to tell him that as he was ill and as such he was going to be replaced. But he kept on pleading that he would be all right. Any way I fixed the date of the recording. It became very difficult for the recording engineer as well as for the other artists as Saqi had to work hard to steady his breath after every two lines. His breathing had developed a heavy hoarseness which got further magnified over the microphone. Kedar Sharma recorded his breathing separately and we used it as an effect of the sawing of a log of wood in the production of the drama "*Mahan*" later on. Finally, his condition became alarming and we had to take him to the great specialist Dr. Ali Mohammad Jan. He felt sorry for him and told us that he should be taken to his sister's place. Jan Sahib knew that Saqi had no family except his sister and her children. We put him in the radio station car. I went back to the doctor to collect his prescription. Dr. Jan told me that his lungs were in very bad shape and he wouldn't survive the attacks. So it was better for him to be amongst his kin. So, my colleague Moti Lal Kachru carried him to where his sister lived.

Meanwhile I decided to have him replaced. Next day I went to see him along with Pushkar Bhan and Som Nath Sadhu. Saqi seemed to be better and tried to laugh his trademark guffaw and said, "See how I scared you all!" Then turning to me he beseeched, "Please don't replace me. I am fine. You send me the car tomorrow and I'll show you how I shall finish the recording in one go. Please!" I held his hand said, "I shall."

While returning, we decided that there is no harm in sending the official transport to him, being sure that he would not have the strength to get up. But to my amazement, lo and behold, he entered the studio supported by the driver Abdul Aziz and asked for the script. Moti Lal Kachroo, our Production Assistant handed over the script to him. And after a reading he told me to start the recording. We were all amazed at his will power. He finished the recording of his portion in one go. I went into the studio and embraced him. His body was hot like a furnace. He had very high fever. I pointed it to him. He said, "Never mind. Tell me didn't I

keep my promise?" I said he sure did and led him to the duty room where his cheque was ready. Keeping the cheque in his *phiran* pocket he thanked us all. I escorted him to the car and sent him back to his sister's house. After a couple of days we got the sad news, that Jaggan Nath Saqi was no more. We all went to be part of his last journey. And when the pyre was ablaze and consuming him, his sister's son, Omkar Nath Ji Pajnoo told us that the Radio Kashmir cheque was still in the pocket of his *phiran*. That was Jaggar Nath Saqi, an institution all by himself.

There were many other stalwarts who created history for the drama Section of Radio Kashmir. Stalwarts like Makhan Lal Saraf, who became an integral part of my creative endeavours; not only in radio but also in my stage and film productions. He is a name to be reckoned with, in theatre and television. He has not given up even after losing whatever he had in the land where he was born. Then Mohammad Sultan, although a high ranking officer in the state government's Co-operative Department, he had a passion for acting. With a soft but assertive voice he acted as a lead actor in hundreds of our radio plays. An excellent human being, he made a lasting impression in my mind. I made him act in our film "Mainz Raath" too. Then, Pyaarey Lal Raazdan, again a product of theatre, he had a timbre in his voice that could be moulded into any character. Though he had joined as a librarian, I initiated him into radio drama. A young man with a passion for acting he qualified and later on joined the bandwagon of programme planners and made a name for himself. I was very happy when he started taking up individual productions and took charge of the Drama Section later on after I shifted to films and television and even won the Akashvani Annual Award. Next comes to my mind Mohammad Yusuf. A civil contractor by profession he was passionate about acting. With a powerful voice he could play a majestic king, a convincing advocate, and an affectionate father. Then there was Trilok Dass, a doyen of the early days of theatre in Kashmir. Whenever I required in a script, a gorgeous and loud character or a pharaoh type of a cruel king as per the script, Trilok Dass was the

best choice. There were many other important artists too whom I motivated to join as casual artists, such as Omkar Nath Raina, Laxmi Narayan Kaul, Makhan Lal Sadhu, Kanaihya Dhar Raja Hamid and Virender Razdan. Out of them Virender Razdan got trained in The National School of Drama and later on moved to Mumbai and joined television and earned a name as Vidhur in B.R. Chopra's TV classic *Mahabharata*. It is tragic that he passed away in the prime of his youth there in Bombay.

I remember how he became part of the long chain of drama artists of Radio Kashmir. I had first seen him in the stage play *Gasha Taarukh* written by the prolific writer Sajood Sailani in the Annual Drama Festival of the Jammu & Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages. His voice and an impressive personality were his assets. I always had him in mind and wanted to utilize his talent when I moved from broadcasting to films and television. God gave me a chance and I cast him in my TV serial *Saaye Deodar Ke*. And, as expected, he gave a memorable performance, one of his best. It was a delight to spend a few weeks with him when we were shooting for it in Chail near Shimla in Himachal Pradesh.

Another very talented artist who impressed me in the play *Gasha Taarukh* was Pran Chandra. He too passed the audition and became a drama voice and later on an announcer and served All India Radio till his retirement. I am then reminded of another great talent, Shafi Mohammad Mir. A really emancipated human being, Shafi Mohammad Mir was an artist with varied talent. I somehow got emotionally attached to him. I can never forget his ever smiling face, a soft yet effective voice. Besides being a drama artist he was a trained Bharat Natyam dancer and had learned some classical music too. I utilized this talent of his in the opera *Piya Baaj Pyala* and *Vitasta* that I produced for the State Academy. There were other artists who started with acting in plays and were taken on staff, as announcers and anchors. Even after becoming part of the staff they continued to love to act in my plays. I am indebted to them all. Prominent amongst them were Shanta Kaul, Nayeema Ahmed, Surja Sahib, Opendra Khashu, Pran Chandra, Mohammad Amin, Noor

Mohammad Lone, Sharif-ud-Din, Mohammad Sultan Pandit, Jalal Geelani, and Girija Watal.

The plays I got written by others were mostly based on the life of the common man, the pressing problems he faced in today's fast moving times. Thus there was the necessity of having very many more talented artists to bring those characters to life that had been portrayed in these plays. They would take the challenge and give landmark performances. As far as women artists were concerned, the dearth of the early days eased with the spread of education and we discovered that quite a large number of these women were getting interested in becoming radio artists. That is how we discovered talented artists like Brij Kishori, Nirmala Dhar, Kantyani Ganjoo, Bimla Raina, Parveen Kausar, Shahnaaz, Phoola Channa, Jai Kishori, Hafiza Kauser, Nilofer and many others besides the veteran Sajda Begum and Nabla Begum.

Since fifty percent of the plays used to be in Urdu, we had to hunt for talent for Urdu plays too, which in this case was rather difficult. Though Urdu is the state language and the medium of instruction till the middle classes we did not have teachers, howsoever well read, with good pronunciation and correct accent. So the students, who were taught there also, lacked in these spheres. That was why, a number of Urdu drama artists especially those of women performers being small, had to be repeated in our programmes which made them somewhat monotonous. But the scene changed with the spread of education, old taboos began to get dismantled and talent started emerging. Out of the new talent, that expanded the spectrum were Uma Khosla, Zia Durrani, Rani Mehboob, Rita Langer, Ruth Sahni, Urmila Zutshi, Indira Madan, Saroj Madan, Shahnaaz, Usha Sawhney (later on Sonia Sahni of films). Sughra Jalaludin, Promila and Jyoti Raina. Besides them we had many women artists approved by other stations of All India Radio, who would be on longer visits or whose husbands belonging to the defence services would be in Kashmir on posting. They all did wonderful work. One great thing about them was that they too became members of our fraternity till they remained in Srinagar.

I was always in search of talent. Being basically a theatre worker, I tried to watch dramatic performances of almost all the plays of all the major drama troupes to pick up the best performers who would suite the broadcasting medium. That was how Makhan Lal Saraf, Virender Razdan, Abdul Majeed Butt, Pran Chandra, Bharti Zaroo, Asha Zaroo, Opendra Khashu, Girija Watal, Raja Hamid, Noor Mohammad Lone Mohammad Yaqub and others were discovered. It was because of the co-operation of all these artists that we were able to contribute regularly to the National Programme of Plays, about which I have already made a mention. Before winding up this section, I must pay a special tribute to two of the programme officers from All India Radio who guided me in the initial stages in getting fully acquainted with the aesthetics of radio drama and Indian sensibilities. They were K.P. Shangloo and with greater regard, K. R. Pandey. K. R. Pandey was an authority on English literature, particularly English Drama. He had been a professor of English before joining All India Radio and had been in charge of the Drama Section of the Delhi station of AIR before getting transferred to Srinagar. One of the best human beings I have ever met, Pandey Sahib, as we called him with respect immediately won our hearts. Bashir Butt, Ghulam Rasool Qadri our librarian at that time, Ali Mohammad Lone and Pushkar Bhan had become my close friends and we were all won over by Pandey Sahib. He was living alone in one of the bungalows in Ram Munshi Bagh. So, after finishing a day's work, which would be late in the evening, we would escort him via the beautiful Bund, right up to his residence, chatting, cutting jokes forgetting that he was elder to us. He had a terrific sense of humour and provided graphic descriptions of life in Lahore, his birth place, which he greatly missed. He, being a born actor would mimic the street vendors of Lahore to perfection. We became so close that wherever we went, we would try to be together. He developed an elder brother's affection for both me and my wife Shanta which lasted till the end of his days. While talking about him, I am reminded of one of my very memorable productions "*Gidh Ka Punja*" in which I had cast

him to play the role of the ghost of the deceased son of an old couple.

The play was in fact a radio adaptation of W.W. Jacob's drama "*Monkey's Paw*". It was adapted for the radio by Sughra Jalaludin. The story goes like this: An old couple who had lost their only son in an accident is living alone in a coastal city. One of their friends who is a sailor comes to them, after a long voyage, to offer his condolences. After due formalities, he is requested to stay for dinner. While narrating his adventures at sea, he opens his satchel and brings out a pouch. From its within, he brings out a dried paw of a dead monkey and tells them that it had been given to him by an old sailor, saying that if one asks for some wish after rubbing it, the wish would be fulfilled. He in the same breath says that he had not done so as he had no faith in such myths. The old couple gets tempted and requests him to give it to them. The sailor, thinking it to be of no use to him, hands it over to them and leaves. The old man too was not very much interested in it. But the old lady could not wait and told her husband that they must try it and wish for their son's return. In short, they rub the monkey's paw and wish their son to return. In no time, dogs in the cemetery some distance away start howling. This howling starts coming closer and closer and with that the painful voice of their son calling his father comes over the top of the barking of the dogs. The old couple opens the window to see. The sight is horrible. Shrieking and wailing they watch their son's body half eaten by worms, some bare bones showing and some flesh dangling from his sides. He was crying and begging them to let him in. Seeing his plight the old couple weeps and wails. They fall on their knees and pray to God for their son's salvation.

Leaving aside how this tragedy is resolved, we come back to K.R. Pandey's histrionic talent. The modulation of his voice created an unimaginable atmosphere of agony, fright and horror that many listeners rang up to protest and said that they were so horrified after listening to the play that they did not dare to come out of their rooms as it was night. That was Pandey Sahib's capability in

histrionics. It was my good fortune that when I was transferred to All India Radio Jalandhar in 1957 along with Bashir Butt, Pandey Sahib too was posted there after serving his tenure in Srinagar. He joined Bashir Butt and me who were living there, in a spacious bungalow and shared the space with us for many months till he brought his family. This proved to be bliss and made us discover what a great human being Pandey Sahib was besides being a very imaginative broadcaster. Because of his caliber he later on became Director of the Staff Training School of All India Radio and kept on grooming the talents of young programme planners and broadcasters for different stations of All India Radio till his retirement.

Besides Annual Drama Festivals, we had started presenting radio plays on stage, and tried to make the audiences, part of these plays. In this genre, plays of wit and humour became very popular. We would record these plays along with the audience's response there on the stage and then broadcast them later on. In such festivals of wit and humour, we used to invite drama troupes from other Hindi and Urdu stations. These festivals, besides becoming highly popular, helped our playwrights and artists to interact with each other and gain from each other's experiences.

While talking about the participation of artists from outside the state I am reminded of an occasion that turned out to be an event worth recording. The great Balraj Sahni who belonged to Kashmir more than Rawalpindi, as he would himself say, had come to Srinagar after his memorable film *Hum Log* was released and had become a super hit. I would consider Balrajji as my mentor because it was he who as the General Secretary of IPTA (Indian Peoples' Theatre Association), had initiated us as members of the S.P. College Dramatic club to start a wing of IPTA in Srinagar. Afterwards we became good friends, in spite of a gap of twenty years in our age. This friendship too lasted till his untimely death. Balrajji had been working in BBC during the Second World War and was a popular broadcaster before joining films.

It was the year 1957. Balraj Sahni was in town; a thought came

to my mind why not try to motivate him to act in one of our plays? So one afternoon in my meeting with him, I broached the subject. He agreed after a little coaxing but put forward a condition that he would select the play himself. So, I sent a few scripts of well known writers to him. He selected an anti-war play "*Jungbaaz*" written by Sikander Taufiq, an eminent Urdu writer of the pre-partition days. Balrajji selected the *Jungbaaz*'s role for himself. So this was a sort of a coup and we were keenly waiting for the day he would come for the recording. More than us, it was our very likable driver Abdul Azeez who had seen *Hum Log* quite a few times and had been greatly impressed by its dialogues and Balraj Sahni's style of delivering them. He would keep on reciting a few of them and trying to enact them too whenever we would teasingly ask him to oblige. He had put on the best of his shirts and a sparkling white *salwaar* on the day he had to fetch Balrajji from his residence, 6, Wazir Bagh. The studios were still in the Polo Ground then.

When Abdul Azeez brought Balrajji in the car and pulled it just near the stone stairs leading to the studios. Bashir Butt and I, along with the members of staff on duty were there to receive him. As the car stopped, Abdul Azeez rushed to the door of the car and opened it with a flourish. After receiving him, Bashir Butt asked Azeez, "Did you tell Sahni Sahib how many times you have seen his film *Hum Log*?" I turned to Balrajji and told him that Abdul Azeez remembered every dialogue he had spoken in the film. Balrajji looked at Azeez with a smile. Bashir Butt asked Azeez to deliver the dialogue he liked best. Abdul Azeez without waiting, started to deliver the famous dialogue from the film, "*Paro! Jis diye mein tael na ho usey jalne ka kya adhikar? Diya khud nahi jalta. Uska tael jalta hai,*" and while delivering the dialogue without caring that the stairs were of stone Azeez stooped down and laid himself on the stairs. Balrajji was amused and clapping, bent down, picked Abdul Azeez up, embraced him and then entered the studio.

After a couple of rehearsals, we recorded the play and were amazed at how Balrajji changed the tone of his voice from a soft spoken hero of Hindi films to the frightening demon like deplorable

states to build theatre halls in his name. In Srinagar too, a Tagore Hall was built and a festival of Tagore's dramas was held. We prepared a Hindi translation of Tagore's Bengali play "*Malancho*" under the title *Phulwari*. It is a play with very few characters. In this play I discarded the traditional box type of sets and introduced a set designed on symbols which were synonymous with the theme of a couple, caught in the web of self destruction. In this play I played the role of a young man representing the *Bhadralog* (the educated middle class of Bengal) strata of society and Rita Jitendra played my wife, the second woman character was played by Zia Durrani. This play was staged in Nedous Hotel. This play, with its high intellectual content was highly appreciated.

During the Tagore Centenary, Tagore Hall too had been completed. To commemorate this event, a Drama Festival was announced and like many other theatre groups, Akashvani Club too was invited to participate. I requested Ali Mohammad Lone my friend, a partner in the field of creativity, to write a fresh play for this challenging festival in which even well known theatre personalities from outside the state like Habib Tanveer and his better talented wife were participating. He told me that for quite some time he was fiddling with the idea of adapting Dostoevsky's novel, *My Uncle's Dream* for the stage. I also had read the novel and had gauged its potential to become a powerful drama. So I readily agreed and it was decided that we should stage it and christened it, "*Khaloo Jan Ka Khwab*". It is the story of the decadence of the bourgeoisie of Russia after the October revolution. Ali Mohammad Lone adapted it to our own conditions after Independence, when princes, *nawabs* and *jagirdars* were divested of their fiefdoms and their power except their titles. I played the role of a prince, an old man with an artificial leg, artificial teeth, an artificial eye, wearing a wig to hide his bald pate. In short everything artificial except his old princely title. Suffering from dementia this "*Khaloo Jan*" is the symbol of the decaying aristocracy. He is cleverly manipulated by a jobless young man whose eye is on the old man's palatial house, the only property left to him. This young man makes this

'*Khaloo*' believe that he was his nephew and tells him, that to get rid of his boredom, he must take him on a journey to the city. To which the old man readily agrees.

On their journey to the city their rickety *buggy* falls into a ditch where the old man makes a mess of himself. But they somehow reach a big town. The young man, manipulating him, settles him down in a hotel. After a couple of days, '*Khaloojaan*' very nicely groomed by his so called nephew, is introduced by him, with great pomp and show to the local poverty stricken middle class society, dying to get a status in the higher strata of the society around. The news spreads around in no time that a big and wealthy prince had come to visit the town. After coming to know that this prince was not only rich but also a bachelor, ambitious mothers, with daughters of beyond marriageable age, start vying with each other to hook this fat catch to get them married to him. The potential marriage would therefore automatically elevate their status.

It turned out to be a fantastic script and I was inspired to launch it on an ambitious scale. P. S. Bhatia, the station director promised all help. So we all set down to plan its production. Every member of The Akashvani Club insisted that I should myself play the main character, *Khaloojaan*. It was a big challenge to direct as well as act which was made easy by the strong support of every member of the club. We wanted to present the best we could. It was a matter of prestige. We had a very powerful team of actors, comprising Bashir Butt, Manohar Prothi, Pushkar Bhan, Farhat Hussain, Zia Durrani, Sonia Sahni (then Usha Sawhney) Rani Wazir, led by Rita Jitender (Rita Langar then) to support me in the lead role of *Khaloojaan*.

To create atmosphere of the baseness of a greedy and overambitious middle class society I had designed the set in a loud gold and mauve colour combination with heavy but faded tapestry and mismatching furniture lifted from a 'juna bazaar'. Makeup and the overall getup of the different characters too were planned in accordance with the class they belonged to, especially that of *Khaloojan*. I had to use the mould of a wooden leg be used to keep

the stockings in shape, a flamboyant wig, thick glasses that kept on slipping from the beam of the nose, an uncomfortable denture, a new three piece suit and a gaudy tie. Laughter in Tagore Hall would hit the roof the moment *Khaloojan* made his eagerly awaited entry into the drawing room of the host together with an old widow, and her beautiful daughter. The timing of the artists was perfect and there were no gaps for the laughter to even take a breather.

The Three Arts' Club which had got formed under the patronage of Habib Tanvir, the highly awarded stage director, by Shameem Ahmed Shameem the well known journalist, Satpaul Sawhney and other members of Amar Singh Club, had selected another play from world classics, *The Would Be Gentleman* by Moliere, with the title, "*Mirza Shohrat*" an adaptation by Habib Tanvir himself. He was himself playing the role of the neo-rich *Mirza Shohrat*, struggling hard to earn respectability in society. He was supported by his wife. There were great expectations that this play of his would beat us all. Habib Tanvir had staged it many a time and had gained popularity in other parts of the country, but unfortunately it did not click here in Kashmir. He felt defeated and wound up after the very first show, while *Khaloojan Ka Khwab* became the favourite of the audiences and ran for quite a few days to packed houses. It was the script, its pace, its dialogue, great performances of the actors and its slick production that made Akashvani Club and Radio Kashmir Srinagar proud. It became for quite some time talk of the town.

While recollecting the memories of those days I am reminded of an awkward situation connected with this play. Khwaja Ghulam-u-Sayedain, one of the greatest educationists the country has produced, was the Director Of Education of Jammu & Kashmir and an advisor to the Sadr-i-Riyasat, Dr. Karan Singh. Doctor Sahib was not in Srinagar at the time when *Khaloojan Ka Khwab* was staged. When he returned to Srinagar, Sayedain Sahib told him that he had witnessed a memorable stage play. This created a great desire in the mind of Dr. Karan Singh to see the play. He wrote a polite letter with a request to the Station Director, in which he

mentioned how greatly ^{Digitized By eGangotri} Sayedain Sahib had liked the play and wanted to know when there could be a repeat performance. The Station Director felt elated and wrote back that a special performance could be put up for him. We too felt happy and agreed to the proposal.

Everybody knows that Dr. Karan Singh had fractured his leg in an accident. Because of this he has a limp. Now the problem was that my main character had an artificial leg and was limping. This worried P. S. Bhatia. He implored me to avoid the limping as this might hurt and annoy the Sadr-i-Riyasat. But I argued that a portion of the play very prominently talked about his artificial leg and then its mention comes off and on in the play. So as the director of the play I did not agree to make any changes. To cut it short the play was staged as it was in the presence of Dr. Karan Singh and his wife. He thoroughly enjoyed it and came onto the stage to congratulate us. As he was sitting in the front row exactly facing where I (*Khaloojan*) was with the boot raised it would have been considered insulting. To avoid such an awkward situation I changed the angle of my posture while sitting. It was Doctor Sahib's magnanimity that he did not take offence.

In this way, Radio Kashmir's Akashvani Club started playing an important role in the development of theatre in the state. *Kanjoos*, *Phulwari* and *Khloojan Ka Khwab* were followed by *Hero Machama* written by Pushkar Bhan, *Director Chabi Ram Chhaya* written by Ameerq Hanafi, *Shudh Budh Kam Shud* by I. S. Johar and other short and long plays dealing with the day-to-day life of our people. In fact the heroine of most of the films produced and directed by I. S. Johar, Sonia Sahni, was originally, Usha Sawhney our announcer and my drama artist, who had played the role of the girl about whom *Khaloo Jan* thought was going to marry in the play. I.S. Johar, who had come to witness *Khaloo Jan Ka Khwab*, was so impressed by Usha's beauty and talent that he offered her a long term contract. That is how she moved to Bombay and became Sonia Sahni.

It was Akashvani Club that rose to the occasion whenever a

fund- raising event was required to help the sufferers of calamities inflicted by nature on them, like the earthquake in which two villages of District Badgam had got caved in and the floods in which many people were rendered homeless in Sonawari and other low lying areas of the northern parts of the valley. We would raise money by putting up variety entertainment programmes and plays like *Viz Cha Sain, Ya Tan Ya Tadakh* and excerpts from the *Machama* series .

In one of such show, *Hero Machama* was repeated. Dilip Kumar and his wife Saira Banu were our guests. They were regular visitors to Kashmir those days. Dilip Kumar had come to our studio to record an interview during the day when *Hero Machama* was scheduled to be staged in the evening. After winding up the interview I who was interviewing him invited him to grace the occasion in the evening in Tagore Hall. He promised that he would come and we were honoured when he came to watch the play along with his wife Saira Banu and donated some money too for the earthquake sufferers.

While thinking of those glorious days I am pained to recollect how the activities of Akashvani Club got hampered because of the political situation across the border that was simmering for quite some time and came to the surface after the 1965 war that was inflicted by Pakistan on our country. Though the music concerts and some minor activities continued, the pressure of work and the transfer of Bashir Butt, Ali Mohammad Lone and I to Delhi and Jullundhur finally stopped the activities of the Akashvani Club. But the professionalism of its productions laid the road map for many an amateur dramatic club which took the movement forward and did creditable theatre till militancy engulfed normal life of the people in the Heaven on Earth which had so gloriously nurtured and nourished all of us.



THE DOCUMENTARIES

Besides hundreds of plays that Radio Kashmir Srinagar broadcast during my tenure in broadcasting, I had the good fortune of travelling not only through the entire valley, but also through Jammu, Kargil, and Ladakh. With a passion for knowing my land and the people living in it, I was thrilled when a directive came from our Ministry that we must plan programmes about life in the border areas along the Line of Actual Control in our state. This was a challenging project that was undertaken in collaboration with the Defence Ministry because most of the areas were restricted for civilians. The purpose was to project the life of the civil population living there, their culture, their rituals their hardships, their aspirations and their relationship with the Defence Personnel posted there. I must record here that besides our PRO Major Bhardwaj, deputed by the Army Head Quarters as our liaison officer, our team had the guidance of the veteran journalist Sat Paul Sawhney who had covered quite a few border areas and even the war fronts since 1948. We had commissioned him for providing basic inputs wherever needed. Besides this assignment, he, having been a good photographer, was allowed by the army to take photographs of the social life of the people, their folk singers and the ritualistic dances in the '*gompas*' and monasteries. It may not be out of place here to mention that S. P. Sawhney, as he was called, had almost retired at that time from active journalism. This assignment gave him a fresh impetus and he accompanied us all through. After the completion of this project he made slides of all the photographs he had taken during those long tours and then travelled to Sri Lanka and other

places narrating his experiences supported by those slides.

Amrit Lal Maini, the Station Director then, who had lauded the idea and given support, decided to accompany the team lest we face any hurdle while travelling through those far flung areas. Three recording engineers, Moti Lal Kaul, Mr. Kilam, and Mr. Zutshi were also deputed to accompany by in turn. As it was early spring, it was decided that we should start the journey from the Jammu region because it would be hot after that in the areas we had to cover.




THAKO CHAK

We started from Thako Chak where it is very difficult to differentiate between our fields and the fields on the other side of the Line of Actual Control. Huge stretches of standing crops were seen as far as the eye could see. It is difficult to find out one's own moorings except the area called no man's land which is full of land mines. There were very high observation posts on both sides like the '*machans*' we see in our countryside. It was not land alone that had got divided but many families too had been separated from their relatives. As the entire area was trying to recapitulate their lost life after the war of 1971 there was some peace in this area when we reached there. We met a couple of such families who had got divided who admitted that they would in the darkness of night, try to cross over at the risk of their lives to meet their relatives. But, on the whole, the villagers of the areas had now got used to this situation. They had this apprehension however, always lurking in their minds that this peace may not be permanent, because there was intermittent firing from the other side against which our troops had to retaliate. The crop of wheat had ripened and harvesting was going on, on both sides beyond the so called 'no man's land.' A song in chorus rose from the other side and after a frightening pause its reverberations resounded from a distance from this side. The language, the same words too and the pathos too similar. There was a lump in my throat. God ! What a tragedy!! Had anybody sought their permission that their land was going to be divided into two? People, innocent people, divided, forced to become enemies living constantly under the threat of death.

CHAMB JORIAN

From there we travelled to Chamb Jorian, an area which had borne the brunt of atrocities of both the wars of 65 and 71. There was hardly a house in Jorian which did not have gaping holes in the walls created by mortar shells, staring at us like open wounds. Though nearly three years had passed since the Shimla Agreement had been signed, the fate of this village was still hanging in the balance. People did not feel safe as there was always the fear of cross-firing and infiltration. They would have migrated long ago. But how could they leave their fields and livestock besides the land of their ancestors? The situation was worse for the people of Chamb across the Manawar Tawi, which had been liberated in 1965 but was recaptured by Pakistan and, according to the Shimla Agreement, had to be returned to Pakistan. The CO of the army unit posted over there took us through the village of Jorian to the Mandala Bridge which had to be blown up in the 1971 war to stop the advancing Pakistani Army to cross over to Jorian. We tried to zoom and photograph the Pakistani flag fluttering over the Pakistani picket there in the Chamb village across, which we were seeing standing on the half-broken Mandala Bridge. Down below, some distance down the waters of the Manawar Tawi, we could see a couple of tanks blasted and deeply stuck in middle of the river. Having lived for two years in the Punjab where Bashir Butt and I were transferred to in 1957, we had seen how the worst sufferers during the Partition were the people of the Punjab whose wounds have not been healed even after a quarter of a century. Those wounds are still there and fresh ones are inflicted upon these people living in border areas. What a tragedy!



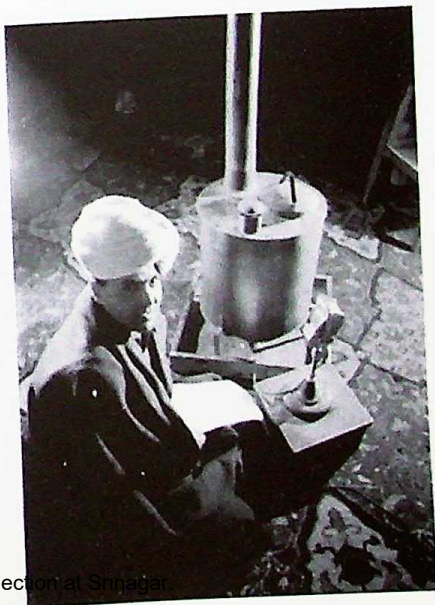


Group photograph taken after Radio Kashmir Srinagar was taken over by All India in 1954. (Sitting) Maheswar Nath, M.L.Malhotra, Hakim Ghulam Mohiudin, B.R. Kapoor, Dr. B.V. Kesar (Minister I&B Govt. of India), Janki Nath Zutshi (State Director General I&B), A. L. Maini, Kashi Nath Bamzai. (Standing) Ehsan Ul Haq, Moh'd Shafi, Abdul Rashid Bandey, Habib Ullah, Ali Moh'd Lone, Pran Kishore, Ghulam Hasan Eljaz, Bashir Butt, Prem Nath Pardesi, Habib Ullah Allaqaband, K.R.Gupta, M. Verma, Ali Moh'd, Mohan Lal Aima, (Standing second row) Habib Ullah, Ghulam Nabi, Abdul Aziz, Ghulam Moh'd Koka, Madhav Lal.



Staff on an outing: (sitting on ground) Noor Moh'd, Manohar Prothi, P.K. Kher (sitting on second level) H.U.Zargar, Pran Kishore, Bashir Butt, P.S.Bhatia (station director), Ali Moh'd Lone, Pushkar Bhan, Som Nath Sadhu (overlooking), Jaggar Nath Saqi and Qaisar Qalandar.

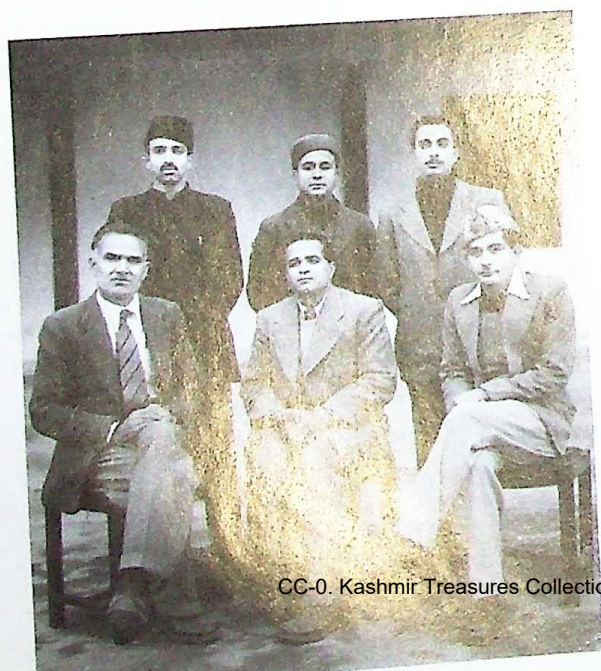
Mohan Lal Aima recording Abdul Ahad Nadim's famous naat 'Ya Nabi Gosh Feryadan Thav' in the make shift studio with a turban, sign of veneration. Mark the saw dust 'bukhari' in the centre.



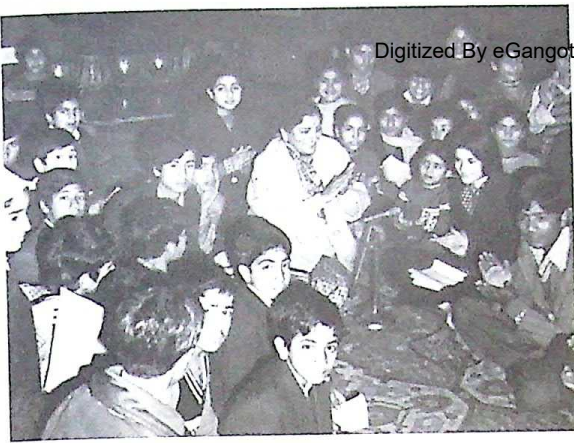


Aima presenting a musical feature, with Qaisar Qalandar and Jhandey Khan watching.

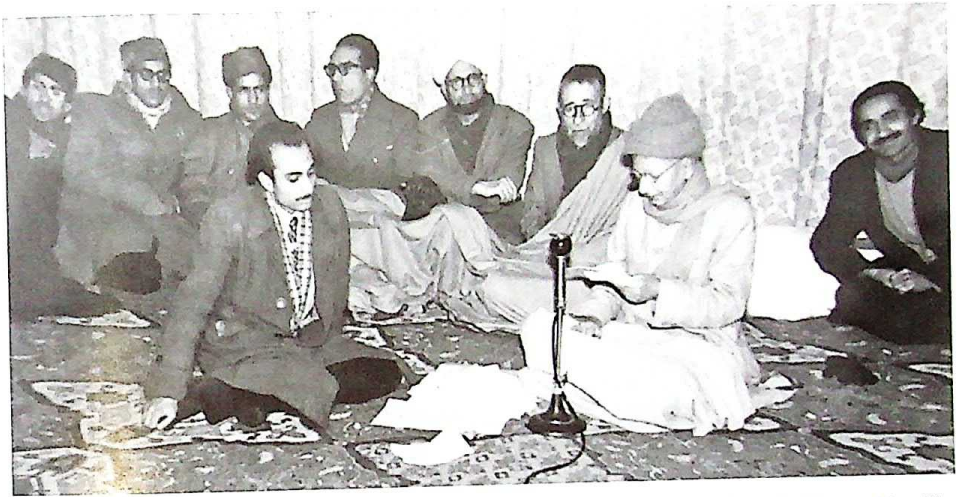
Mahinder Kaul & Pran Kishore.



(Seated) Muztar Hashmi, M.L. Malhotra, Basant Butt, (Standing) Ali Moh'd Lone, Kedar Sharma, Pran Kishore.



Aapajan(Shanta Kaul) conducting Children's Programme.

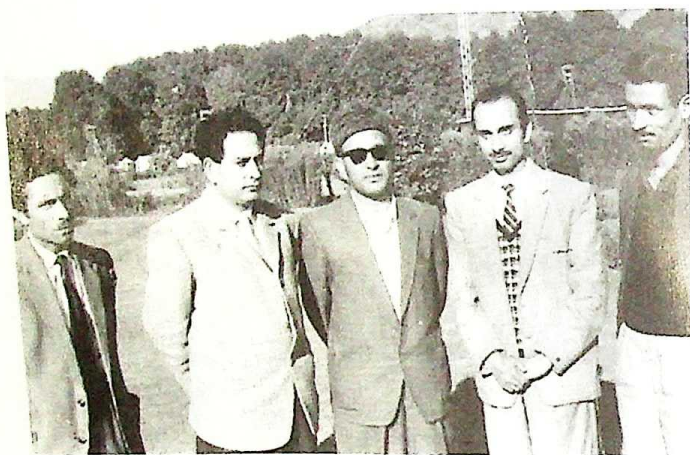


Conducting a Memorable Mushira, Participants Amin Kamil, Shamsuddin Hairat Kamili, Fitrat Kashmiri, Shahzore Kashmiri, Noor Mohammad Roshan, Hamidi Kashmiri and Master Zinda Kaul reciting his poem.

Mir Ghulam Rasool Nazki,
Prof. Prithvi nath Pushp
Discussing Mystic
Thoughts With Swami
Lakshman Joo
(the Great Shaivist Scholar)



With
Ustad Bismillah Khan,
(Bharat Ratna) in Circuit
House Srinagar after
recording an interview
with him for Radio
Kashmir Srinagar again
after fifty years.



Jalal Geelani,
Bashir Butt,
Pran Kishore,
Kedar Sharma and
Moti Lal Kuchru.

Lassa Kaul and Sharif-u-Din
outside the new studio.





A.L. Maini, Station Director and Pran Kishore with the entire team of engineers who had completed the dredging operation in Khadenyaar that removed the bottle neck reducing the flow of the river Vitasta.



R.P. Itigi, Station Director, receiving the Sadiq Memmorial Award for the very popular programme Zoon Dab.

The programme staff escorting Kedar Sharma on the day of his retirement to the foyer of the studios.





Presentation staff (Sitting) Krishan Kumar, Qaisar Qalandar, Shanta Kaul, Nand Lal Chowla, Uma Khosla, Tripta Bhatia, Setia (Standing) Sayed Hafiz-u-din Baihaqui, Muzzafar Kashani, Verma, M. K. Tiku, Mohammad Amin, Lassa Kaul, Jawahar Lal Raina, Siraj Meerani, (Top row) Jalal Geelani, Som Nath, Hira Lal Kaul, Noor Moh'd Lone.



Pran Kishore mixing music and effects for National Programme of Plays in the makeshift studio after the fire in Polo Ground studios

Shanta Kaul Interviewing Dora Bannerji, the first woman commercial pilot of India.



Pushkar Bhan recording the experiences local agricultural staff are having working with the visiting Japanese farmers Sharif-u-Din and The Japanese farmer too in the photo.



Aziz Rashid Bandey, Ali Moh'd Lone, Kamal Ahmed Siddiqui, Bashir Butt and Pran Kishore.

Sharif - u- Din recording Mirza Mohammad Afzal Beg.





Participants in the programme 'Zoonadab'—a family feature broadcast daily from Radio Kashmir, Srinagar, except Saturdays, at 7.15 A.M.

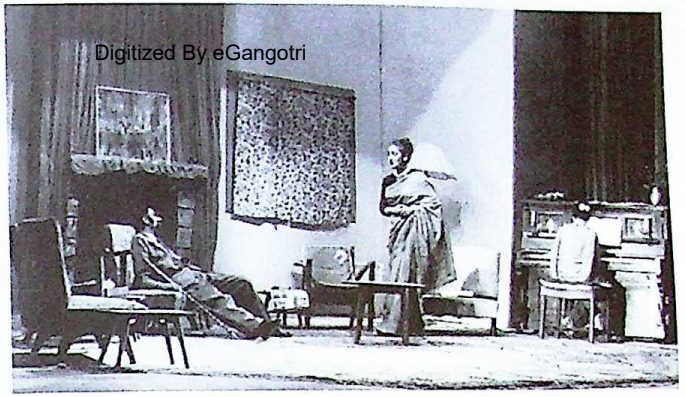


The Russian leaders Marshal Bulganin & Nikita Khrushchev with the cast of the opera Bombur Yamberzal written by Dina Nath Nadim and directed by Pran Kishore.



Pran Kishore, Rani Mehboob and child artist Vijay Mattu in the stage play Deewane Ka Khwab.

Rita Jitender, Pran
Kishore, Sonia
Sawhney in Khaloojan
Ka Khwab
(Akashvani Club
Production)



Cast of Opera Baj Pyala with Dr. Chenna Reddy Chief Minister Andhara and
Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah in Hyderabad after the performance.

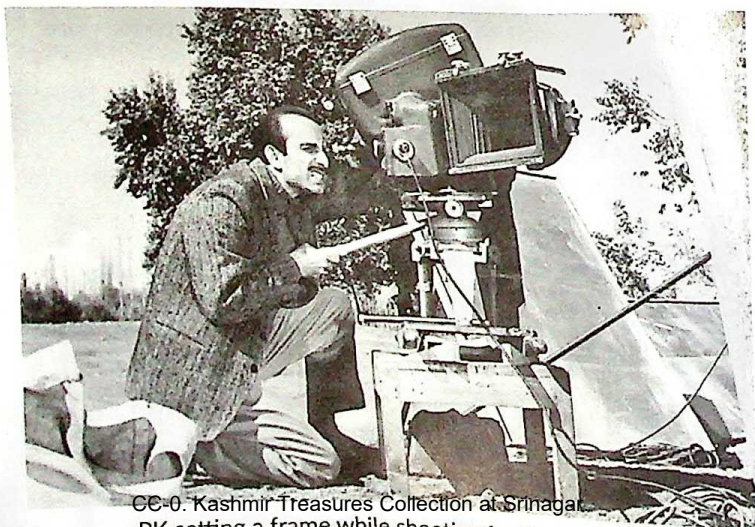


Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah,
addressing the audience after the
concert of music on Habba Khatoon
Day.

Pran Kishore receiving a mega bouquet from the Speaker West Bengal Assembly after the final performance of Nadim's opera Vitasta in Calcutta.

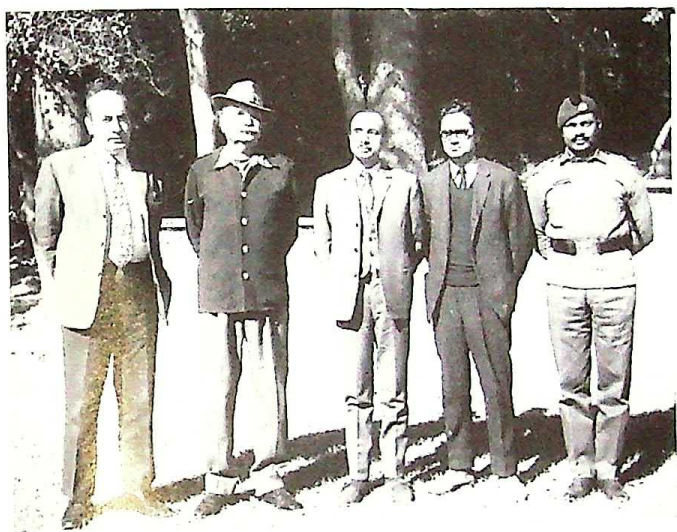


Shanta Kaul presenting listeners' choice programme from the old radios.



CC-0. Kashmir Treasures Collection at Srinagar.
PK setting a frame while shooting for film Mehjoor.

Shooting Film
Mainzraat.



Recording team with
General Bhagat,
General Officer
Commanding Northern
Command in Udhampur



CC-0. Kashmir Treasures Collection at Srinagar.
At the top of Bhimbergali on way to Bafliaz.

In Bafliaz with the officers holding the fort there. This bear cub was stranded and was rescued by the jawan holding it.



Kashmiri SUFIANA artists with Hafzas with similar musical instruments as those of the artists of Sinkiyang.

Pran Kishore in Domo Square with the famous Domo Church in the background, Milan Italy.



NOWSHEHRA & JHANGARH


Our next destination was another area which had remained one of the hottest battlefields in 1947- 1948 when Pakistan wanted to conquer the state of Jammu & Kashmir by force and had failed because of the support the Indian Army rendered to the valiant people of the state. This was the sector of Nowshehra, Jhangad and Rajouri. It was Jhangad where the final battle was fought and won in which many Pakistani soldiers were killed and the rest had fled never to return. The hero of this historical battle was the young 38 year old braveheart Brig. Mohammad Usman, one of the most efficient senior officers of the undivided Indian Army, who had turned down a tempting offer by Pakistan to move over to its wing of the army which had also got divided. But he opted to remain in India. It was he, under whose command, the Indian Army defeated the invaders and cleared the entire Nowshehra Jhangad and Rajouri area of the Pakistani tribesmen and the Pakistan army. It was he, who attained martyrdom in the final assault at Jhangad itself.

So we had decided to go first to Jhangad and visit the sacred place where this great son of India had fallen, fighting till his last breath. While we came out of the village of Jhangadh and started going up to the tree where the marble with an epitaph honouring him had been installed, some villagers too accompanied us. We all bowed and offered a prayer at the memorial. There were a couple of villagers who said that they had witnessed the battle there. One of them, who must have been nearing seventy-five, said that he was an army porter then. So we recorded him and later on checking with the army records and found his narrative was more or less correct. The area from which Brig. Usman had driven the enemy

away and secured it for the state and the country is huge, which we realised when we proceeded from there towards Rajouri. It was afternoon when Brig. Usman, having won battle after battle was returning to his camp when suddenly a bullet flew in from nowhere and hit him. He staggered and tried to reach for his gun when another bullet hit him followed by another and this lion of a soldier fell just there where we were standing. There was the silence of death all around. But he had completed his mission. After saluting again we came down to our vehicles and proceeded towards Rajouri.

While moving ahead we were wondering how tedious it must have been for the Mughals to travel on this long hazardous terrain on foot, horses and elephants. The cycle of the journeys was started by the Great Mughal, Jalal-u-Din Mohammad Akbar, who was the first Mughal King to visit Kashmir. We even recalled how he conquered Kashmir by deceit after his army had been defeated. Having lost, he had invited Yusuf Shah Chak, the last king of Kashmir to the banks of the river Attok to sign a treaty of truce. But instead of signing the treaty he got him arrested. This road was used for many years in the past by Kashmiri traders too before the Mughals, for exporting their produce to the Punjab and importing goods, especially salt, from there. It was called the (*Noona wath*) Salt Route then. But then how could the poor '*noona*' as a name withstand the aura of the grand Mughal name? Hence people forgot *Noona Wath* and started calling it Mughal Road. Five hundred years later it is still called Mughal Road.

While we were talking about the past, Satpaul Sawhney was busy checking the map in his diary. In fact it was he, who had helped finalize our itinerary. He turned to us and said that the next stop would be the village of Chingaz, We will have to find a place to stay for the night as it will take us more than an hour to reach Chingaz and it will be almost evening then. Major Bhardwaj, our PRO, assured him that the accommodation had already been fixed there and we must straightaway go to the BSF head Quarters there.



CHINGUS

BSF headquarter in Chingaz were established in probably the biggest '*sarai*' cum fort built by the Mughals on this route. The entire Mughalsarai complex had been repaired and even slightly renovated. Credit for insuring that its original architectural character was not disturbed, goes to the Border Road Organization. A couple of rooms in the '*sarai*' had been reserved for us. We had a comfortable night there without 'the ghosts of the Mughal soldiers' whose rooms we had occupied, disturbing us.

Next morning, the Commandant of the unit there, took us around. The first place where he led us to was the inner courtyard of this complex which looked more of a *sarai* than a fort. In the centre was a grave over which a *chadder* of green satin had been laid. '*Chingaz*' is the Persaian word for entrails. You see this grave here. The entrails of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir are buried in it. That is why this village and the area around is called 'Chingaz'. explained the Commanding Officer, "Everyone in Kashmir who has interest in history knows that Jahangir had died after his last stay in Kashmir while returning to Lahore. Noorjehan, fearing a revolt and a struggle amongst those who would try to usurp the throne in Lahore, kept the death of the emperor a secret. It would defeat her plans about the successor to the throne if the news of the emperor's death reached Lahore before her. So, taking her most trusted men into confidence, she got the dead emperor's intestines removed and secretly buried here. After stuffing his abdomen with herbs she got him stitched up. After which she placed him in a sitting posture in a howdah right up to Lahore. Sad for her, news somehow reached

Lahore before her arrival and her designs failed.” That was the brief story about the name ‘Chingaz’.

After spending some time praying there, the Commandant guided us to the small but very well kept mosque a little distance away from the grave and overlooking it. The atmosphere all around was serene. When shadows of trees around lengthened and finally got merged into the darkness of the night we saw a small contingent of jawans walk with easy step carrying an earthen lamp. They placed it on the grave and lit it. After that, they stood at attention, saluted and then retreated. Watching them we got moved beyond words. I choked with emotion and the Persian couplet of Noor Jehan engraved on her grave in Shadra, Lahore as an epitaph resounded in my mind:

*“Bar Mazar-e-Ma Ghareenban Nai Charage Nai Gule
Nai Par -e- Parwana Sozad Nai Nawa -e- Bulbule.”*

(At the grave of this poor soul, there doth neither a light flicker nor a rose laid,

Nor does any moth consume itself here, nor is there the wail of any nightingale.)

But there were people here to salute and light a lamp at the grave of the entrails of the man whom she immensely loved.

The day was spent in the village which was a little distance away from the ‘sarai’ recording interviews with the villagers. Everyone expressed gratitude to the jawans of the Border Security Force posted there. They were happy that these jawans there, were a guarantee for their safety. Otherwise the enemy, across the border was out to create trouble for them after stealthily infiltrating into their land. There were however lots of complaints against the state authorities too who were neglecting their area. They complained that there were schools but without teachers, dispensaries without doctors. And where there were doctors, there were no medicines. They had hope that the road to Kashmir, if at all built, would solve their problems. We assured them that we would do our bit to help them by projecting their grievances through our broadcasts based

on the recordings with them. We interviewed some villagers whose ancestors had been in the Mughal army and had married and then settled there. The villagers had many stories about how the caravans of the Mughals would camp there for quite a few days to enjoy the beauty around. These stories must have travelled through the passage of time, generation after generation and reached them.



RAJOURI & THANA MANDI

Our next destination was Rajouri. The road was in fairly good condition and we reached Rajouri much before the expected time. So we went straight to the Deputy Commissioner's office that had to guide us from there. Though our stay here too had got organised in the army officers' mess meeting the civil head of administration was obligatory. Everyone in the DC's office was formally courteous. The Deputy Commissioner had gone to Srinagar for the DC's conference. We were guided by one of the officials to the army mess from where the sprawling golf course that the army had developed could be seen. Laid at the foot of the mountain range on the right, it spread over large expanses and waves of lush green stretches was a feast of colour for the eyes. Seeing it, we were reminded of the golf course of Gulmarg, though it wasn't that big. It was amazing how the army created beauty and organised systems wherever it would be stationed, irrespective of the atmosphere it was confronted with. I was wondering why a civil population could not do it. May be because the discipline, the army has, is missing from civil society. Anyway, seeing such surroundings, we went gaga over the beauty of Rajouri. But the next day, after we had crossed over the bridge to where the real Rajouri city was situated, it was a shock to see the civic conditions there. Old houses were huddled together and the new houses, some complete, some partly built, were all without any planning. Nature had given the place an ethereal beauty and what had man done to God's world? In spite of being the District Head Quarters its condition was not worthy of its status.

The official from the DC's office led us into the interior of the town to meet some prominent people there. They had nothing to say except complain against the authorities. When asked why the drains around were full of muck they would say that it was a tragedy that the authorities did not care to clean them. When asked who threw the muck there, they looked at each other and became silent. After recording a few interviews and some folk songs there, we packed up and left. We had been told that Thana Mandi was one of the busiest towns under the Rajouri DC's jurisdiction. Besides that, the main town Thana Mandi had been an important stop for Mughal convoys going to Kashmir. It had an interesting history too. I had read that the people there had still some connect directly with Kashmir which was just a couple of mountain meadows away. So we were keen to go there.

The uphill drive to Thana Mandi was beautiful. Thick forest on both sides of the road was a feast of colour. The trees were laden with flames of fire of forest flowers in full bloom with the splashes of their orange, glistening through the green foliage was a sight to see. The ascent reminds one of going up the Jammu Banihal road except for the thick forest around. It must have been eleven in the morning when we reached Thana Mandi.

It has a population of more than six thousand people and a Municipal Committee. The head of the committee was courteous and offered all assistance. It was a coincidence that he had been a student of history and knew everything about the past of this area. So I started my recording with an interview with him. He talked about the importance of this town. "Besides having been an important camping site for the Mughals this was an important market where the shepherds would come to barter butter, ghee and other milk products from their buffalos and cows, for maize, grocery, salt and cloth etc. in olden days. Being on the route from the Punjab to Kashmir, it was an important market place for merchants of both sides too. The sale of butter and ghee still continues here. That might be the origin of the name of this village which has grown into a town. 'Thana Mandi', market of

'*thayin*' (butter in Kashmiri). When you talk to the people here, you will find that 90% of them will tell you that their forefathers had a lineage with the Pundits from Kashmir. This place is considered sacred too, because here is the *Dargah* of the great saint *Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah* who had settled here in the 15th Centaury." After finishing the interview with him we expressed the desire of meeting some prominent people in the village. He gave us an escort who first led us to the *Dargah* of *Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah* and then to the *Mughal sarai*. The *sarai* was not well looked after and was dilapidated in some parts. The guide kept on adding to the information given by the head of the Municipal Committee while he walked us through the village. He finally led us to the head of the highly respected Raina family Halmat Raina. The surname Raina rang a bell in our minds and we longed to meet him.

Halmat Raina's house was a little distance from the main habitation. It was some sort of a complex of a couple of houses and some sheds. Halmat Raina, a dignified old man was more than happy when we introduced ourselves, especially when he came to know from our local escort that we had come from Kashmir and that too from Radio Kashmir. "Ah Radio Kashmir Srinagar! Always reminding me of my childhood when I listen to Kashmiri songs over it. I have attended a couple of marriages of our old relatives along with my grandfather and listened to some beautiful songs then. I was very small. Even my father took me there once. My great grandfather, peace be to his soul, originally belonged to Rainawari in Kashmir. Then a rule of tyranny broke out there and he and his brother had to run for their lives along with their families. It probably was during the Pathan period. They somehow reached here and then ultimately got settled down. After some time his brother moved to *Shahdara Sharif* about seven miles from here. *Shahdara Sharif* too was a venerable place. It was here at the *Dargah* of *Baba Shah Badshah* that both the brothers accepted *Bayyat* at the hands of some *darvesh* and embraced Islam. Our Pundit relatives had stayed back. They are still there. They would

invite my grandfather if there was some wedding in the family but after *Bhai Sahib's* death who was the grandfather's cousin's son this last link broke. Well, everything is destined by the Almighty Allah. By His grace after that tragic turn of events our destiny got redeemed and we are doing well. So is our second part of the family doing well there in *Shahdara Sharif*." "You were originally Rainas?" "No, we were Bakshis. Since my great grandfather originally belonged to Rainawari he changed it to Raina probably because of his love for his birth place Rainawari. There are other such Rainas too here. You see, we all here, are basically settlers from Kashmir. Majority of us were *Pundits* from Kashmir. Some of them retained their surnames but most of them have adopted surnames like *Dar, Mir, Wani*, etc."

While we were talking about the past, a young handsome youth with the first unshaven growth on his face hurriedly entered the room but seeing us there tarried at the door and was about to go back. But Halmat Raina stopped him "Come here. These people are no strangers, they have come from Kashmir. (turning to us) He is my grandson, Mohammad Altaf." Altaf *salaamed* us like a well brought up boy. Halmat Sahib asked him why he had come. "Forks are ready. Would you like to see them before I get them packed?" "I'll do that but before that you get some tea for us." When I enquired about the forks, his grandson was talking about, Halmat Raina said,

"Let us have a cup of tea, then we shall talk about it."

The typical Kashmiri salt tea had a layer of cream on top of the cup. The well baked corn flour chapattis too had an aroma of fresh butter. After finishing with the tea Halmat Raina led us to his workshop, a long single storey building where blocks of wood were stacked on one side and on the other some craftsmen were busy on the small lathes moulding the blocks of a light yellow coloured wood into cups. Halmat Raina looking around his workshop turned to us. "This is our workshop. You see these blocks of wood. It is from them that we carve combs, cups, plates, knives, even teapots, spoons and forks. These articles are not only pieces of decoration

but can also be used.” He then showed us all the art pieces he was talking about. The forks, with their delicate teeth, were amazing. Halmat Sahib watching me trying to check the strength of the forks, said, “No, it won’t break. The first credit must go to the wood we are using. It is called ‘*chikri*’. Chikri trees are found only in this area. Look at this soothing shade of yellow. When polished, it gives off a golden glow. Though it is very soft to handle it is strong enough to bear the pressure of our tools and even that of the lathes. You see this small box? It has a small sliding lid. Open it - there is a surprise for you.” I slid the cover of the matchbox-sized box and was amazed to see it packed with very tiny toothpicks cut into the shape of tiny daggers. “Here are some combs. But the combs our relatives in Shahdara Sharif make, have no match. This is our art and our trade too. All our wares are sold in exhibitions of handicrafts throughout the country, and even abroad.” While walking out of the workshop Maini Sahib asked him whether he remembered any Kashmiri songs from the past.”Why only from the past? Didn’t I tell you that I listen to the *Farmaishi Programme* of Kashmiri songs quite often? The boys here have organised a group of singers. They sing some Kashmiri *Chakri* songs too.” Hearing this we could not resist the temptation of listening to them. Halmat Raina was thrilled when we put the suggestion to him. He agreed to call the boys provided we promised to record them and then broadcast that recording from Srinagar. We assured him that it would be done.

When after sometime the singers assembled in the courtyard with their instruments we were pleasantly surprised that they looked like a group of our own *chakri* singers carrying the same instruments, the rabab, *sarangi* and *tumbaknari* but with a wider circumference and a shorter neck. They began with a Kashmiri *chakri* song though with an accent followed by some *Pahari* songs. But these too had the rhythmic pattern of our folk music.

The trip to Thana Mandi had been worthwhile. Look at these people, they, in one way or the other, expressed their affection for the lands their forefathers had left hundreds of years back. While in Thana Mandi, I felt that I was in a Kashmiri village amongst my

own people. Could we at that time have even imagined that lakh and lakhs of Kashmiri Pundits would have to run for their life and to save the honour of their daughters, just after sixteen years like the ancestors of Halmat Raina and other inhabitants of this town? They say history repeats itself. But repeating it, in such a way, is one of the worst tragedies of mankind. Anyway back to 1974. Sati Sawhney had got a lot of fascinating material around to shoot. He was excited and if the light had not started to fade, he would have lost sense of time and kept on with his photography. But the sun could not stop its journey. So he too packed up and joined us in thanking Halmat Raina, his craftsmen and the singers for making our trip so rewarding. After bidding them farewell, we proceeded to the accommodation arranged by the head of the Municipal Committee for us to spend the night.

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BEHRAM GALLI

The next day we packed our lunch and set out on our journey towards Bahram Gali, the pass between Rajouri and Poonch. The road going uphill was well laid out by the Border Road Organisation. So we covered the distance to the top in less than the time we had calculated. The top of this pass is flat, almost an even ground. We got our vehicles parked on one side and got down to survey the area. Looking around I felt that the valleys on both sides in the lap of the mountain ranges was the entire world because I couldn't see anything beyond on either side. On one side of this tableland was a big shed, in fact a large *Gujjar* 'dhoka' (a flat roofed gujjar house) with one side open, which was stacked with bags and tins. There was a grocery shop too. A small crowd of *Gujjars* was purchasing heaps of corn and other provisions. We talked to them. They were purchasing daily provisions for their families and herds to last for a month of their journey to the meadows of Kashmir via Peer ki Gali. After having a cup of tea in the army post overlooking the galley, we boarded our Jhongas (jeeps) and sped to Noori Chamb, an important landmark on the old Mughal Road, because of the waterfall there, where Jehangir would sit for hours to watch his lady love Noor Jehan bathe in its waters. It took us hardly 30 minutes to reach there as it was only a kilometer and a half from Behram Gali.



NOORI CHAMB

Our next stop, after Bahram Gali, as scheduled, was Noori Chamb. This enchanting place was some distance from the main road through a grove of trees. *Chamb*, in Kashmiri means a fall or a sudden depression in a landmass, even with a waterfall. We could hear the gurgling sound of water from a distance. Following the sound we reached the fall. On looking around we found that this place was quite secluded as if nature had wished to keep it safe from human eyes. Even when we reached the sound, we did not see the waterfall directly and had to move further so that we could see the gorge cutting the ridge into two, through which the mercurial water was gushing down from a considerable height. A sort of a spring had been formed by the pressure of the water falling from that height and then, after overflowing ran into a stream speeding away churning through mossy stones. There were still a few steps of stone intact where Emperor Jahangir would sit to watch the mesmerising beauty of the cascade of water sliding down. On one side of the spring was a big granite rock hewn on the side facing the spring. This side had been planed and polished. The story about the name of this spring, *Noori Chamb* is again related to Noor Jehan. It is said that she used to bathe in the waters of this spring and under the fall, watching her reflection in this rock and after her bath draped herself gazing at it. But some accounts say that a big mirror was placed there where Noor Jahan would do her makeup. Man has from times immemorial enjoyed weaving myths about heroes and heroines, their deeds, along with the places connected with them. So we let this romantic myth remain as a

tantalising fable in the programme that I later on produced for broadcast. The journey from *Noori Chamb* onwards was smooth right up to Bufliaz, our next stop and then onwards to Poonch.



BAFLIAZ

It was a soothing evening in the month of April, when I, along with my recording team, reached Bufliaz, a beautiful hamlet in the lap of the Shivalik Mountains. After checking in at the officers' mess there, we went to sleep. In the wee hours of the morning I was woken up by an excited chorus of bleating sheep and their lambs. I pushed the curtains aside and peeped through the window. Down below, the forest in the morning hazy light looked like a dreamland with hundreds of sheep running all around and their lambs getting bundled after them. Soon after, the contours of men and women following them, emerged through the mist, some dogs started barking and running to encircle the scattered flocks of sheep to assemble together. As the day was breaking I thought it better to withdraw from the window and get ready for the day.

When I came out, the soft light of the sun had bathed the jungle and the flocks of sheep in gold. I was mesmerized and walked down the slope and saw this 'jirga' (a group) of shepherds settling down under the shade of the deodars. Their children, in a playful mood, were trying to catch the newly born lambs rolling down the slope like white balls of fluffy wool. A loud sonorous voice came up reverberating, "Hey, you naughty brats! Don't scare them! Stop! Stop! I say, stop!! They will fall down the ridge!" I turned towards the sound and saw a tall sturdy old man with a henna-dyed flowing beard, wearing a long shirt and a *salwaar*, standing there on a rock as a sentinel overlooking his clan. Decked with an elegant turban of raw silk and a shepherd's staff in his hand, he looked like a mythological Greek god in the glow of the sun. Attracted by his

aura I walked to him and offered my salaams. He casually returned the salutation and turned to continue chiding the children chasing the lambs. Quite irritated he shouted to his men, who were pitching a tent under the trees, "Why doesn't someone go and stop those sons of Satan and bring them back?" Seeing me still standing there he looked at me and asked, "Yes?" I introduced myself. Hearing that I had come from Radio Kashmir Srinagar, and wanted to talk to him and record him too if he didn't mind, made him change his attitude favourably. And he said, "Come, come sit here." He spread his woolen shawl and made me sit on it and then seated himself too. He looked at me with a smile and said, "So you have come from Kashmir to record me?" Seeing that he was getting somewhat suspicious, I explained to him what my mission was. Thus, after motivating him to open up, I called my recording engineer and we settled down to talk. He was quite articulate and introduced himself as Rajwali Khan. "Ask any Gujjar or a Bakerwal here on this side of the Pirpanchal mountain range or on the other side in the mountain village of Kashmir, 'who Rajwali Khan is' and they will give you my true introduction. Not because I am one of the biggest sheep breeders around but because I am the link connecting my clan with those Gujjars now settled in the mountains of Kashmir." He then narrated how in search of greener pastures he and his family would migrate in April to the Kashmir mountains, along with their flocks of sheep and the ponies, carrying his household essentials to spend the summer months travelling right up to the northernmost mountain pastures in Kashmir. Then return by the same route to the other meadows in the Jammu region when autumn sets in Kashmir and the meadows start drying up. It was not he alone who was leading this sort of a nomadic life but almost all the clans of these shepherds kept on migrating from hotter climates to the cooler regions and vice versa. When exactly this migratory life of their ancestor had started and how many centuries ago, nobody knew.

From Bufliaz there are two roads going in opposite directions. One goes to Poonch and the other to the village Mandi, the last

major village on the mountain road to Shopian. We had to go to Poonch, the final destination on this leg of our tour.

Poonch was a small princely state governed by Raja Jagdish Singh, a cousin of Maharaja Hari Singh whom the British at one stage were conspiring to make the Maharaja of the State of Jammu and Kashmir to have a complete grip over the state. But the plot got disclosed and the British scheme failed miserably. Time is the greatest leveler. Even Maharaja Hari Singh had to abdicate. The palace of Poonch built by Raja Jagdish Singh, was partly deserted and partly housed the Brigade headquarters when we visited the city. In fact arrangements for our stay were made by the army there in the officers' mess.

The main Poonch town is situated almost in the centre of the valley with the Poonch Tawi flowing and dividing the area into two segments. The town is exposed to the direct shooting range of Pakistani fire. While going through the town, we were shown the big fissures that had been created by Pakistani guns during the wars of 65 and 71. Even the Deputy Commissioner's office had heavy mortar marks on its walls. The guide from the Deputy Commissioner's office took us to a point from where the Haji Pir mountain range could be clearly seen. The reader can imagine how pained I must have felt for I had been there during the 65 war. It was unfortunate that we had to give Haji Pir back to Pakistan which our army had conquered then. How close was the valley of Kashmir to Poonch from this side! Residents of Poonch said how happy they had been when they heard over the radio that Haji Pir had been captured by our brave soldiers. They were happy that now they would not have to go to Jammu first to go to Kashmir, as the old road, which was the nearest route to Kashmir, would be opened for them.

The people in Poonch expressed that they were always in fear of peace getting disturbed even at the slightest disturbance in the Kashmir Valley or across the Line of Actual Control. They kept on praying that the threat of militancy should somehow end so that the developmental work did not suffer in their area, for they had

been receiving disturbing news through the *Bakerwals* (*Shepherds*) that some training camps were being started to train youths in weaponry and other violent activities on the other side. This had become a matter of great concern. These nomadic shepherds would travel along the borders and at times cross the Line of Actual Control and as such, their observations had to be taken seriously. This fear of the people living near the border areas was looming large throughout the entire Line Of actual Control in all the three regions of the state of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh.

While moving around the rural areas we were delighted to see how horticulture had developed there. While in Poonch you feel that you are not in the Jammu region but some part of Kashmir. The land is so fertile with lush green vegetation all around. As far as horticulture is concerned, Poonch is blessed. This land has the distinct advantage of having almost all the fruits of the valley along with the fruits of the plains. While you have apples cherries, peaches, plums, and pears like in Kashmir, at the same time you have mangoes, lemons, bananas, oranges etc in Poonch. We were amazed at the size of the peaches and plums grown there. After spending a few days in that area and imagining if the Haji Pir Pass would have been somehow retained by us, we too would have immediately returned to Kashmir instead of first taking a detour to Jammu, which we did.



RETURN TO JAMMU VIA RAJOURI KATRA ROAD; A VISIT TO SALAL.

On our return journey to Jammu we took the newly built Rajouri-Katra road. It was quite educative because it gave us an idea of how the whole area was almost an unending range of mountains. In that sense, Jammu is a more mountainous terrain than Kashmir. After reaching Katra we got caught by an urge to go to Salal to see how far the work on the Hydraulic Power Project there on the river *Chenab*, had reached. Besides, we were told at the Guest House in Katra that the tunnel meant to divert the course of the river *Chenab* was being inaugurated the next day. So we left for Salal early the next morning. The construction of the road along the almost vertical descent of the mountain in itself was a great feat of engineering. We were later on told that the construction of this road had cost a few lives too. After passing through the town Jyoti Puram, we somehow reached the site just in time for the function of opening of the tunnel.

This site in the annals of engineering is called *Dhiyan Gadh Loop*. Here, the river *Chenab* takes a turn round the small hill, on which a fort had been built by Raja Dhyani Singh and then suddenly falls nearly four hundred feet down, after which it flows ahead. All this was explained by the Chief Engineer in charge of this project in his address. This natural phenomenon was a big advantage. As we know, the *Chenab* has a huge potential for power production and the proposal here was to build a rock-filled dam almost up to the height of the fort. That is why it was necessary to divert the water of the river first ahead of the loop, through which the water would flow and the area around the hill would remain dry for the

construction of the dam. That was why a big tunnel had been built. The construction of the tunnel too was a great feat of engineering skill.

It was a rewarding day as Shri D. P. Dhar too, who was our ambassador in Russia at that time had come to see the progress of the work there. So we took advantage of the occasion and recorded an interview with him. He narrated how the idea of building a dam there had come to the government. It had been recorded in the old records of Maharaja Hari Singh's time that he, having been told of the potential of generating power there had got the area surveyed by some British or French experts who had given him a report in which it was recommended that this loop had the potential of producing hundreds of megawatts of electricity. They had given him a rough estimate of the cost of its construction which was roughly four *crores* which was about the total revenue of the state at that time. So the Maharaja could not afford it. That was why this project could not be executed then. Since now there was no dearth of funds, the project had been taken up. D. P. Dhar, however, in his interview, expressed his apprehension that it may happen that this project, when completed would generate electricity, but we would not have the required high tension lines to carry it to Kashmir. His apprehension turned out to be prophetic, as we, for quite some time, were not prepared to receive the power produced in Salal in Srinagar.

From Salal we left for Katra and then to Srinagar, without touching Jammu to prepare for our tour to the northern border of Kashmir and then on to Ladakh. After a gap of a couple of weeks, which I utilized in editing material that we had recorded, we proceeded to the north of the Valley of Kashmir and then, to Ladakh.



JOURNEYS AND COVERAGE OF THE BORDER AREAS OF KASHMIR & LADAKH

It will be relevant here to record, that this was not my first journey to Ladakh. My first journey to Ladakh was in 1962 just after the Chinese war. Till that time there was a motorable road only up to Kargil. The connectivity to Leh was through the only airline, Indian Airlines owned by the Government of India. When, after many years of wait and tackling a big scam in the urgently needed road construction from Kargil to Leh, a day did come, when this road was declared completed. The credit for this goes to Sonam Norbo, who, after returning to Kashmir, took this challenging project in his own hands. Norbo Sahib had been the first person from Ladakh or may be one of the first seekers of advanced education from the state, who went to the U.K. to get trained as an engineer. He redrafted the road map. Being well versed with the topography and geology of the area, he applied an indigenous and clever old technique of culvert building in the process. When the day for the inauguration of this road was announced, it was again my good fortune that the coverage of this important event was being assigned to me. The Jammu & Kashmir Minister in Charge of Public Works, Chuni Lal Kotwal in Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad's cabinet was scheduled to inaugurate the road at Kargil. A convoy of eleven brand new Wiley's jeeps was provided by the state garages, which had earmarked their most experienced drivers to carry the party to Kargil. They had to drive us from there to Leh and bring us back.

The party comprised Chuni Lal Kotwal the Minister, Sir Dattar Singh the overall in-charge of Ladakh Development, Sonam Norbo

the Chief Engineer, Col. Raja the Commissioner of Ladakh, Brigadier Wadera, the Chief Engineer of the Border Roads Organisation and a press party consisting of national and state level journalists, staff members of the State Information Department, my recording engineer Zutshi and me from Radio Kashmir.

Our journey started from Baltal. After crossing Zojila Pass (11000, 400ft. above sea level) we travelled through the beautiful meadow of Minimarg and Ghumri, halting for lunch at Drass, the second coldest place in the world. I remember what a dry and desolate place the village of Drass then was! A few dozen of houses built in uneven stones huddled at a height above the road on the left with hardly any vegetation around, was visible from the army camp where we had stopped for lunch. That was the village then. From there, we travelled straightaway to Kargil, stayed there in the school building for a restless night because of hungry bedbugs attacking us. When the call for the morning prayers from a nearby mosque was heard, we heaved a sigh of relief that the morning had come to salvage us from the torture we had been undergoing that night.

The Minister and his party had probably stayed in the army officers' mess because they looked fit and fresh. The sumptuous breakfast compensated for the blood lost to bed bugs. Quickly finishing the breakfast, we got ready for the day and boarded the jeeps and left for the venue of the inauguration.

The inauguration took place across the bridge over the River Suru with a 'pooja' by the Border Roads Organisation staff and some prayer, from the most pious Agha Sahib of Kargil. An emotional speech by the minister was followed by quite a few other speeches, after which, the ribbon was cut and the road was thrown open.

As I had to keep on recording a running commentary on the terrain and the progress of the convoy travelling through it, my jeep was placed ahead of the other jeeps, just immediately after the pilot jeep, leading us. The entire area was a feast of colour, all shades of brown, grey, mauve, and turquoise blue. Not only were

the colours amazing but also the shapes and forms of the mountains around. Some of them were almost hanging overhead. I was lost in this miracle of nature when at one turning my colleague the recording engineer Zutshi, suddenly bent towards me with a jerk and held in a tight grip my arm which had turned cold. When I asked him what had happened, he pointed to his right. I turned to look and was shocked to see that there was a sharp depth of hundreds of metres below the road. I was shocked to see that there was hardly a couple of feet distance between the wheels of the jeep and the extreme edge of the road. Our driver, a handsome young Sardar assured us that we were in safe hands and did not need to worry. He told us that he had already done a reconnaissance of the road. But the road was rough and narrow. Just a little slip and we would have gone down the fathomless depth. I put the microphone back into my bag and held the seat frame tightly. My colleague did the same. As the day was progressing fast, our fears kept on increasing. There was no sight of the road getting wider anywhere.

After some time we got lost once more in the miracles of nature unfolding before us. The driver informed us that we were nearing the second high pass Nmikala (Pillar to Heaven) higher than Zojila. We were soon there. From a distance, this strange vertical rock formation did really look like a huge pillar holding the sky above. The convoy did not stop there for long and continued to descend to Bodh Kharbu, where we stopped at the army camp for a cup of tea, after which the ascent again started to the highest pass between Kargil and Leh called Fotula at 12,500ft. above sea level. We stopped there and bravely managed a group photograph because of the strong wind which was hurling the rubble scattered everywhere, all around us.

Leaving the flying rubble behind, we started descending the slope on the other side. The road ahead started getting gradually narrow and finally became a strip through a gorge. The young Sikh driver laughed seeing us turning pale, "Don't worry sir. Hold fast for a few minutes. We are about to reach Lamayuru. Sahibji, you must see the area. It looks like a long chain of fortresses and has

animals of clay." So we relaxed a little and waited for that intriguing sight. After a while the pilot jeep suddenly stopped. So did our driver and the jeeps that were following us. The road was luckily somewhat wider here. But even then we did not dare coming down from our jeeps. We were just pondering, as to what must have happened to make the pilot jeep stop, when we saw Brig. Vadera, Sir Dattar Singh and Col. Raja walking past us. I noticed that Brig. Vadera had a rosary in his hand. Col. Raja told us to relax and move on. "We have to inspect the progress of the work." Saying this, he hastened to join the others.

The pilot jeep started and the convoy moved ahead. The speed had now reduced Brig. Vadera and the others had gone ahead on foot and we did not notice them, till we had covered the entire Lamayuru gorge. The sight on our right below the road was fascinating. It was a miracle of nature. A world, markedly different from all the features around. It really looked like a fragment of the moonscape as had been mentioned in so many books on Ladakh. In spite of a great urge to get down and spend some time here we couldn't, because the sun was fast vanishing behind the lofty mountains. The village, with its Gumpa perched on a height, laid across the road, looked like a fairy land. Work on the road was still in the excavating stage and the drive had turned horrifying. Brig. Vadera and others were still on foot with Vadera reading the beads. Anyway we somehow reached the stretch leading to Hangroo Loops and descended the steep miles of road winding and rewinding to the plain level below. The road was smooth from there. So it was a great relief.

We had to stay the night at Khalatse, a village on the banks of the mighty river Indus. We increased our speed and reached the bank of the river where a makeshift bridge had been put up by the army and Border Roads Organization. The sun was about to set. We were asked to get down and cross the bridge on foot. It again was such a harrowing experience that I get the jitters even now, while thinking and writing these lines. The bridge was built on the support of thick steel ropes taken across the mighty Indus, rushing

at a terrific speed nearly two hundred feet below. The planks laid for our crossing the bridge rattled and the ropes though thoroughly tightened were not helpful to stop their swaying. Somehow, we managed to cross over. After all of us had crossed over, our jeeps were sent across one by one. We heaved a sigh of relief on boarding the jeeps again.

There was a great 'Mela' organised in a huge ground some distance from the bridge by the army and the local authorities. The entire ground was full of people from villages around. And when they saw our jeeps approaching, they rushed to greet us with the shehnai players playing to the rhythm of the drums. Dancers and singers from Leh and other areas had been called, who put up a grand performance in the lights provided by a big generator. These electric lights were a great attraction for all the villagers who had not seen them till that time. A great miracle for them! There was great and interesting material all around to record which added colour to this occasion.

The festival ended around midnight and the next day we left for Leh in the wee hours of the morning. Passing through the villages of Nimo we turned towards Leh from where the main pathway to Zaskar valley starts across the Indus. The convoy was heartily hailed on the way by the villagers who had gathered on the road. From Nimo to Pheyong and then on to Leh the journey was exciting, a pleasant experience through fields fed by the waters of the calmly flowing Indus. I asked our driver to speed up as I had to reach the main bazaar of Leh much before the rest of the convoy, to narrate and record this historical event.

The route from the point from where the ascent to the main town and the bazaar of Leh started had been decorated with colourful flags, prayer scrolls and buntings that floated over the road like waves of colour. As we were nearing the Balgan Gate, the fabulously decorated and painted entrance to the main Leh bazaar, the melodious songs blaring over the loud speakers became louder and louder. And when my jeep entered the gate the entire bazaar and the mountains around resounded with cheers and the

cries of exuberance of the crowd. I moved to the back seat of our jeep so that I could watch the convoy of the Minister and other dignitaries enter the gate and then glide through the sea of a crowd gathered there right up to the end of the bazaar, where a big stage had been built. It was an exciting experience and I didn't have to wait for words, to describe the scene. Words came flowing out from within, seeing the excited crowds cheering, singing and waving like mad.

After the customary reception by the officials and the prominent citizens near the stage, we were taken to the state Guest House, a bungalow in the centre of the town where we had to stay. The public meeting was scheduled for the evening. So we retired to our rooms after lunch and were about to stretch ourselves when a loud outburst of a crowd shouting in anger followed by slogans woke us up. This intrigued us. The noise of this turbulence was coming from the bazaar where the crowd was waiting for the public meeting. We did not dare go out to see as to what was going on.

After a little while, one of the attendants of the guest house came rushing in. He too was agitated. On our enquiring, he told us that a driver of the convoy, a young Sikh had cut a joke with a young local girl and asked her if she would like to go on a drive to the river Indus. "The girl's name is Khati who has won the title of Miss Ladakh, a very brave girl. She had pounced on that Sikh and given him a thrashing." There was only one Sikh driver in the convoy and that was the driver of our jeep. I became upset and asked him. "What has happened to the man?" Khati did not let him go unpunished. A brave girl as she is, she caught hold of him and got him arrested." We were disturbed and wanted to know what further action would be taken. The helper told us "That will be decided at the public meeting."

The public meeting was a grand affair as far as the decoration of the *pandal* and the big ground at the end of the road was concerned. The whole area was flooded with men, women and children in their finest attire. But the whole atmosphere was tense. After a little while there was suddenly a commotion. People

gathered there turned their heads in the direction of Balgan Gate. The spiritual head, His Holiness Kaushak Bakola's arrival was announced. There spread a silence all around and I watched wave after wave of people prostrating and offering respects to Kaushak Sahib as he proceeded towards the dais. I saw even Shri Sonam Norbo prostrating as Kaushak Sahib reached where he was standing.

After everyone on the dais had seated themselves, the proceeding started with a brief speech by Col Raja, the Development Commissioner and after that the arrested Sikh driver was brought on to the stage. The entire crowd stood shouting in anger. It was due to tactful handling by Col. Raja that the crowd calmed down a little. Then the Colonel explained how highly people there in Ladakh held their women folk. And passing a remark on any woman was an unpardonable crime. To a man, getting humiliated in public was the hardest of all punishments. And that was his verdict as the magistrate. The whole crowd raised their voice in agreement. The Colonel requested the aggrieved girl Khati to come on to the stage. The accused driver was asked to fall at her feet and apologize. The young man hesitated for a moment. Col. Raja reminded him that if he did not do as he was told, he would have to go to jail. Hearing the word 'jail', he fell at the girl Khati's feet and cried and begged for her pardon. The crowd was thus pacified and the driver escorted out. After this delicate issue was settled, the proceedings started. There seemed to be no end to a chain of speakers who showered praise on everyone, especially on their favourite Norbo Sahib. Winding up the function, Kushak Bakula gave his blessings and hoped that a new chapter would begin for that forlorn and neglected land with the opening of this road..

The day ended with a grand feast hosted by Col. Raja in the orchard adjacent to his official residence. It was there that we eagerly waited for the national news from All India Radio. The headline was that the Prime Minister Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru had declared in Parliament that the Kargil-Leh Road had been inaugurated and had been thrown open to traffic. There had been

thunderous applause in the house there in Delhi and here too in Leh in Col. Raja's party. But the press party, especially the members of the national press, looked at each other because, we, who had travelled on the road knew what the truth was. This news was half the truth. The journalists crowded around Sir Dattar Singh and started asking him awkward questions and accused him of disseminating wrong information. He finally tried to pacify the press and said that the whole nation was demoralized because of the debacle in the war with China. So, people needed a boost to their morale. He almost begged the journalists to play down the real condition of the road. Anyway, everyone walked to the buffet table as soon as the food was laid. And the topic changed to the Ladakhi and Tibetan dishes that we were tasting, especially the 'momos'. And the food loving Kashmiris soon forgot the news that had been broadcast by All India Radio.

The next day we were taken round the town. The old Leh Palace and *Sanker Gumpa* were on our itinerary. We were received by Kushak Bakula himself at the *Gumpa* because that *Gompa* was his main seat of authority. Its *Lakhang* (the main Worship Hall) had a unique mystic aura around it, and large '*tankas*' with excellent paintings hanging all around. The Lamas sitting in two rows according to their ranks started the *pooja* and intermittently played on the instruments lying by their side. The *pooja* was led by Kushak Sahib himself sitting under the peaceful statue of the *Padma Sambhava*. We left the *Gumpa* as soon as the *pooja* was over and proceeded towards the old Palace.

The old Palace was at a steep height and now in shambles. But it did convey what a magnificent building it must have been in ancient times, overlooking the entire Leh city and miles beyond.

After spending a couple of days in Leh, the time for our return came and we were told that the jeeps were ready for us. But everybody in the team, including Chuni Lal Kotwal, the minister, did not agree to return by road. We did not want to risk our lives again. As the minister supported us, Sir Dattar Singh promised to organize air travel for us through the Air Force. So we had to wait

for another two days which we utilized in visiting two other important *Gompas*, *Shey and Thikse* not very far from Leh. When we returned from Thikse, we were informed that a military packet would arrive the next day which would carry us back to Srinagar. A military packet was a heavy duty transport plane that was used to transport trucks and even small tanks to frontline areas inaccessible by road.

So the next day we were served an early breakfast and were driven to the airport where there was still an old stone milestone with marking arrows directing travellers to Tibet, Tajikistan, Russia and other borders on the old silk route used by traders. After waiting at the airport patiently for the military packet for a couple of hours, it finally arrived. With a wide door at the back of the plane, it looked like the half of a huge aircraft. The Air Force pilots came down from the plane. The huge door opened and the porters and the army jawans started unloading it. We watched some trucks, some heavy machines and passengers coming out as if from the womb of a steel whale. Seeing us with our eyes glued to the plane, the pilots walked to us. They saluted the Minister and then turned to us and asked how the drive was. A government official, who was escorting us, butted in and told the pilots in excitement. "All the eleven jeeps reached here safely without any trouble." "And how many trucks?" The pompous official looked at us. We gave the pilots the correct information. "Sorry to hear that. The Chinese have built a very wide road on their side at a higher altitude and we have seen three-ton trucks plying on it," the pilots told us, obviously in dismay.

The "Military Packet" had been unloaded by then and was ready to take off. We had filled the required forms absolving the Air Force of any responsibility if there were to be any untoward incident. The Captain requested us before boarding the plane to stand in a row. A huge load of air jackets had been brought for our safety. Everyone was given a jacket and showed how to wear the haversack containing a folded parachute and a handle fixed on the front. After we tied the life jackets, the captain gave his instructions.

"In case of an emergency the door at the rear will open and when I order, "Jump!" you must jump. After that, count one to ten and then pull the handle in front. The parachute on your back will open and you will glide down to safety. But be careful about the handle. The parachute will open with even a little pull. If it opens it will take hours and hours to refold it. We don't have any spare one. So be careful, and have a safe landing." The over enthusiastic Photo Officer of The State Information Department Mr. Bakhshi, to confirm the instructions, said, "Sir you mean this handle," and absentmindedly pulled the handle. And lo and behold, the parachute pitched on his back opened and floated wide engulfing him. He was somehow pulled out. Because of his folly he was left behind as there was no spare parachute. And we came to know later on, that he had to stay in Leh almost a week as the weather had gone bad. The rest of us were requested to board the plane.

When we went up the ramp and entered the huge gate at the back, we were dismayed as there were no cushioned seats laid in rows. Instead, there were two long hospital type stretcher-like folding benches on either side of this huge monster of a plane. We were asked to take our seats on these canvas benches. After we got settled with our load of the parachutes, every one of us was given a small oxygen cylinder as the plane was not pressurized. We had to inhale oxygen from it, if we felt the need for it. The plane took off after the blank space between our rows of benches got filled with some cargo.

In spite of the discomfort of the seating arrangement, we had an exhilarating flight, gliding through a lofty range of mountains, along which we had travelled to Leh. It was a delightful sight to see a large number of lakes embedded like turquoise blue between the silver of the snow capped mountain peaks. I was tempted to record this unique flight and the sights we were passing through. I took out my microphone from my bag and signalled to my recording engineer to get ready. But before we could start recording, the flying officer, looking after us, held me back saying that it was not permitted. So the idea was dropped and watching the panoramic

view through the window we landed safely in Srinagar. That was my first trip to Ladakh and quite eventful.

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THE SECOND TRIP TO KARGIL & LADAKH.

The Time Machine spirals forward from 1962 to 1974 and- I come back to the narrative about the series of documentaries on the life of the people living in the border areas of the state of Jammu & Kashmir and their relationship with the defence forces posted there. This time our journey took off from Sonmarg where we had stayed for a day to collect all the papers issued by the Ministry of Defence and the permits from local authorities needed to travel to areas that had not been opened to tourists then. It was a delight to drive to Baltal overlooking one of the most beautiful pine forests from where an alternate route to the Amarnath cave starts along the waters of the Amar Ganga that flows down after being fed by glaciers near the sacred cave of Swami Amarnath. I was reminded of the narrow and uneven road on which we had travelled in 1962. Thanks to the efforts of the Border Roads Organisation, the road was now, not only widened, but the gradient too was eased a lot. After going up halfway to the *Zojila* pass at 11500 ft. above sea level, we stopped to pay homage to mother nature exactly above the old hut in the forest below, where we were told that Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru had stayed with his wife Kamla Nehru when on their honeymoon and travelled to the holy cave of Amarnath from there. We wondered, if that was a fact, then why had not this hut been looked after well and maintained as a monument?

It was from here that I started my recording. Down below I could see the bridle path on which the old caravans of traders and travellers like *Huentang* must have trudged the eighteen-day arduous journey, stage by stage to Ladakh. As we were reaching

the top of the *Zojila* pass, the pines started thinning and a row of birch trees on the right spur of the top with their silvery white trunks shining in the clear sunlight spread till our sight could reach. After a comparatively smooth drive, we reached the top where there is a memorial to the soldiers who had laid down their lives while making the first road and carrying the dismantled tanks in 1948 under the command of Gen Thimaiya, which they reassembled on the other side in *Mini Marg* (meadow of the deer). That was how our soldiers could clear the entire area of the hordes of the *Qabailis* and the regular soldiers sent by Pakistan right up to Ladakh. After a little rest and some recording with the soldiers posted there and some cowherds keeping a watch over their herds grazing on the slope going down to the meadow below, we moved ahead.

Travelling through the meadow and crossing the rough patch of the road at *Ghumri*, we reached Drass. It was once more, a very pleasant surprise. This second coldest place in the world which I had seen in 1962 looking like a cluster of dilapidated stone houses had turned into a neat town with *pucca* houses, well laid out lanes and a few trees breaking the monotony of stones and bricks. On the right side of the road, along the rivulet fed by the watershed of *Zojila* there was now a long stretch of lush green fields where I had earlier seen wilderness. The Head Master of the school in his interview gave the credit to the army jawans first and then the local population, especially the youth, for turning that wilderness into a green heaven. I am sure that the town of *Drass* and the adjacent *Paan Drass* must have developed further since then. I made my last trip to Ladakh in 1985 along with my colleagues Avtaar Krishan Rehbar and Pushkar Bhan. We were amazed to see the development there.

Leaving *Drass* behind after having had lunch with the army *jawans* posted there and recording their experiences of the severe winter at nearly minus forty degrees centigrade that they had to undergo, we proceeded towards Kargil. The drive along the river *Drass* was very smooth and refreshing till we reached the brown

sandy terrain which in 1996 had been the battlefield known as the Kargil War. That was the area from where our valiant soldiers had pounded the Pakistan army and their formations with our Bofors guns.

From there we drove along with the flowing *Drass* on the winding road, overlooked by high mountains which they call *Pandav Qilla* because of the rampart like rock formation crowning it making it look like a fort. After resting for a while by the beautiful turquoise blue spring *Draupadi Taal*, (*the name given by the army jawans*) a few hundred metres off the road, we travelled by the lush green narrow valley spread over the banks of the river Suru and landed in Kargil, our second stop. It was from there that we crossed over to the *Batalik* area full of multi-coloured wild rose bushes.

Descending from the heights on the Kargil side, we reached the roaring river Indus girdling our territory. While heading to the army camp in the extreme end of our border, we stopped at the village of *Chulichin* (*the village of apricot* where the famous apricots of Ladakh, with their rouged cheeks, were glowing in the sun. It was the apricot harvesting season. Being the peak of the summer months, the orchards were a feast of colour with long stretches of apricot spread on the ground to get sun dried. We recorded interviews with these apricot growing farmers and had a clear view of the economy of their trade of not only selling dried apricot but also the kernels known in Kashmir as '*khayeil*'. These kernels are as nutritious as almonds. A garland of *khayeil* is traditionally used as an offering to a bridegroom when he arrives at the bride's house. Such garlands are used in quite a wedding marriage songs too. We witnessed how the kernels were husked out from the ripe apricots which would then be pressed together and dried. The pressed apricots of Ladakh are known as '*bota tsera*'.

From the village of *chulichin*, we proceeded to another beautiful village, *Silmo*, laid in terraces resounding with the lilting songs sung by women working in the fields. *Silmo* is one of the cleanest

villages we came across in this Batalik area. As this area is surrounded by lofty mountains, the days are short and to make the best of the time we kept travelling and recording villagers who narrated their experiences of life, of bygone days and told us stories and fables of their areas. Many a time, they were helped by Akhoon Ghulam Hassan, the *tehsildar*, a knowledgeable person, acting as the interpreter, who was deputed to accompany us. The Commanding Officers of the army and staff were always there to help us make our tour successful. I was surprised that jawans and their officers knew most of the villagers of their areas by name and shared their happy moments and hours of grief.

We had to enter the villagers' houses, shut the doors and windows as the wind and the noise of the Indus was disturbing the quality of sound. We were offered the local beverage '*chhang*' topped with '*grim sattu*' (roasted and pounded buck wheat) wherever we went, except in Shia households. In the bigger villages as that of *Silmo* the village elders would honour us by offering us a '*Khatak*' the muslin scarf, a token signifying great respect. The mountain slopes, where there was no cultivation, were a vast feast of colour with wild roses of pink, red, purple and orange. Their colours, intermingled by the Master of all creativity Himself, swaying in the strong breeze, wave after wave creating a world of multiple rainbows.

Following the rapids of the Indus we were taken to the nearest point from where we could see Pakistani pickets. Our army *jhongas* (the jeeps) in which we were travelling crossed the gigantic spur of a mountain through the womb of which the mighty river had made its way. The top of the ridge was hewn and leveled by the Border Roads Organization to make a solid motorable road over this natural bridge; a miracle of nature. Sharing the jawans' lunch there, and then hastening back to reach *chulichin* village for a night's stay in complete darkness was an ordeal. Thanks to the *tehsildaar*, we were treated to a meal of steaming *momos* and then the world famous '*gurgur chai*' with a thick layer of butter floating over the brim of fine Chinese cups. Back in the Alpha Mess in Kargil, we

drew a travel plan to cover the villages on the road to the *Sankoo Valley*, an emerald in the lap of rugged rocks. Staying there with the Head of the *Agha Sahib* whose word was law for the entire population, comprising almost cent percent *Shias* was a great experience.

Starting from *Bardo* village, where most of the state government officials are housed, we proceeded towards the northern mountains. Wondering at the long serpentine waterway, cut through the granite-like hard rocks, on the left, almost near the top of the mountain range, carrying water to the far off villages, we reached the most arduous part of our journey through miles and miles of plain ground, full of rubble. At that time a canal was being constructed to carry water from the stream emerging from the mountains of Sankoo Valley to this very long stretch of land. It was a pleasant revelation that this 'no-man's land' had been distributed by the Head Agha Sahib amongst the people living around it, according to the strength and requirement of each family. It was astonishing to watch dozens and dozens of men and women with covered faces, literally lifting the rubble with their bare hands and piling it up to create the boundary of the land that had been allotted to them. They were thus clearing the land and keeping it ready to receive water from the tributaries of the river *Suru*, and the *Kartse* and *Nkpochu* rivulets, through a canal which was under-construction. I am sure that the barren wilderness we had then seen, must by now have definitely turned into lush green fields.

It was in that very area where, some time earlier the J & K Government had started a *Karakul* Sheep Breeding Farm for which *Karakul* sheep had been imported from Afghanistan. But these sheep couldn't bear the freezing cold and gradually died. That was the official version. The rumour however states other facts that they had not been properly cared for and had finally reached the kitchens of the employees. But that was only a rumour, and we hoped that it was. But it was distressing to see the big buildings that had been built for this purpose, deserted and forlorn.

Leaving this desolation behind, we proceeded towards our

destination, the valley of *Sankoo*, the seat of authority of the Head of the Shias, Chief Agha Sahib, which was also his residence. The road was rough and dug at many places as the construction of road to *Zanskar* the most secluded area of District Kargil, was on. The sight of the dark grey mountains all around was depressing and the growling of a wide stream of dark grey water rushing down through the huge rocks added to its intensity. So one can imagine how we must have missed a heartbeat when a quick turn of the road, suddenly unfolded the ethereally beautiful *Sankoo* Valley before us. As we were nearing Sankoo we noticed an outline of a tall figure emerging from the lap of these rugged mountains. When we reached it, we were pleasantly surprised that it was the statue of *Maitreya*, the future Buddha who the Buddhists of Ladakh believed will appear to absolve the world of all sins. When we were watching this a not very well chiseled and weather beaten figure, a question rose in my mind, 'Why on earth had this statue been carved out of this huge rock here where, there was no habitation around?' Anyway, after taking some photographs we continued our journey through those rugged mountains in the folds of which no one could imagine a mesmerising surprise was hidden.

Word had already been sent to the Agha Sahib about the purpose of our visit. We were straightaway led to his residence, a beautiful villa smoothly making itself part of the picturesque location. It was Agha Sahib's graceful personality, noble demeanour, and soft spoken nature that impressed us most and immediately made us feel at home. Educated for thirteen years in Iran in religious jurisprudence, Agha Sahib was extremely knowledgeable even otherwise, and well aware of what was happening in the world. A great reformer, he loved his people and cared deeply for them.

It was almost sunset when we reached *Sankoo*. After a couple of hours' deliberations over a cup of tea, Agha Sahib ordered an early dinner so that we could take some rest because there would be a hectic day ahead. We were pleasantly surprised when a spread of almost a full Kashmiri '*wazavan*' was laid before us. On enquiry we were told that Agha Sahib had an experienced chef as '*murid*'

(a dedicated devotee). To be honest, we were literally famished travelling for almost a fortnight and surviving on canteen food. So we began to gobble the food immediately when it was laid on the '*dastarkhwaan*' embroidered with a couplet in Persian welcoming the guests. After the sumptuous meal in the night, we retired bed, while that great saintly person went to his quarters to fulfill his religious obligations.

As we were tired we soon went into deep slumber. But at about midnight I was woken up by the neighing of a horse and the sound of its fast approaching hooves. I first thought that it was a dream. But when the horse again neighed and stopped I got scared. I raised my head to look around at Maini Sahib and others. They also were turning sides. The neighing of the horse was followed by a knock at the door: first mild and then loud. We were wide awake and listening to what was happening down below. The big wooden door of the house opened with a creaking sound that added to this mysterious atmosphere. After an exchange of voices there was a frightening silence which lasted for a while. We thought that some other guest must have arrived and so again stretched ourselves in our beds. But after some time there was again an unintelligible commotion followed by the creaking sound of the door opening. This was followed by the neighing of not one but two horses. I could recognise a mingled noise of the trotting of the horses and then their galloping and flight. The creaking sound indicated that the door was being closed and latched. Leaving the curiosity to be cleared the next morning, we went back to sleep.

The sweet song of the chirping birds with an intermittent cawing of a crow, followed by the *aazaan* from a mosque nearby, woke us up. I got up and peeped out through the window and saw a beautiful black and sparkling white bird perched on the tree a little distance from the house. I was fascinated by its shimmering colours in the morning glow. But I got terribly disappointed when it opened its beak and emitted a loud harsh caw. It was in fact a crow. I drew the attention of my companions to this bird. It was a revelation for all of us to see a crow that wasn't black. Meanwhile, bed- tea was

brought in with our attention diverted to the man who had come to serve it. As we all were keen to know as to what had happened during the night we enquired from him. "Nothing unusual," replied the man. "It was the son of an old lady, on her death bed, who had come to request our Agha Sahib to fulfill his mother's last wish of having his '*deedar*' and blessings so that she could breathe her last in peace."

"How far is that lady's village?"

"Some fifteen kilometers away."

"And the Agha Sahib traveled all that distance on horseback and that too in the dead of night?"

"Call of Allah!:- How could he evade Allah's call? Besides, fifteen kilometers is no distance. Agha Sahib has travelled longer distances on a number of occasions to alleviate the agonies of his followers."

We were amazed at Agha Sahib's dedication to the service of mankind and his vision for the betterment of his followers.

Before leaving, Agha Sahib did not disturb us, but had left instructions that we should be looked after well and this insured that our recording went on smoothly. The following four days were terribly hectic. We travelled extensively in the area talking to people, recording them, sharing their meals, recording '*Marsiya*' (Lamentations for the martyrs of Karbala) in their language, *Sheena* and even in Urdu. We did not understand their language, but its rendering was so moving that it was difficult to withhold our tears. We did later broadcast them in our Muharram Programmes, after using them in our documentaries. We were pleasantly surprised how unity between the people of that beautiful land had brought about a perfect order in their society and how support from the government had been really utilized for the welfare of the people for whom it was meant. I was amazed to see how defence personnel right from commanders down to the jawans held the Agha Sahib in high esteem and sought his advice in important matters of security and peace in the area.

Another revelation was that even in government schools, the

local teachers were imparting knowledge using the local lingua with utmost dedication with a quality seldom seen in government schools in the cities. One should have seen when Agha Sahib returned after a couple of days how children, with their chubby faces and affectionate exuberance, ran to greet him. It was a sight to see Sati Sawhney hopping around and catching this memorable sight from every angle in his camera. And needless to add, we were all sorry that we had to ultimately leave this small land of bliss and move on.

Back to Kargil, from where we left for *Khaltsi*, half way to Leh, after a visit to the recently establish small factory that had started spinning the *Pashmina* wool sheared from the sheep of far-away *Chanthang* Sheep Breeding Farm. Though not as soft and delicate as the *Pashmina* woven in the Kashmir valley it was in reasonably good demand in army circles and with tourists. We were disappointed to find that a large number of government officials from other parts of the state were either absent or on long leave. This was the complaint of most of the people whom we interviewed throughout this area. They were all praise for the jawans and the officers of the army who would come to their rescue especially when there was an emergency. The medical dispensaries, which we came across everywhere, were always crowded with patients to whose woes the army doctors were patiently listening with local educated people working as interpreters. Army men were everywhere hailed as saviours and not despised as intruders as a section of politically motivated people in the valley tried to project them to be.

Leaving Kargil early in the morning we traversed miles and miles of barren land, noticing how sparsely these vast stretches were inhabited. While our two *Jhongas* were flying past shrubs and bushes, a disturbing thought came flashing into my mind. "Imagine what we would do if one of our *Jhongas* breaks down in this desolate wilderness!" But thank God that did not happen and we reached *Mulbek* from where starts the stretch of Buddhist population. The most interesting feature in this area, besides the

cave monastery of *Shergol* perched high up in the lap of a brown mountain overlooking the National Highway to Ladakh is *Mulbek Chamba*, a nine metre high rock sculpture of the future Buddha, *Mytreya* representing a very clear amalgam of the symbols of Kashmiri *Shaivite* thought and early Buddhist art. I, later on in the course of our journey, found the effect of the *Tantric* elements of *Shaivite* practices prominent in every *Gumpa* (monastery). This verifies that Buddhism after establishing deep roots in Kashmir spread from there to Ladakh and beyond, more than a thousand years ago. After recording the Head Lama of the monastery of the *Shergol Gumpa* we proceeded towards *Bodh Kharbo* for our night stop at *Khaltsi*, an important town half way to Leh from Kargil.

While going round a low mountain feature we saw a cloud of smoke with flashes of demon-like flames rising high up into the sky. When we came to a spot exactly below this fire we were intrigued by the guttural chanting of a man in a red robe surrounded by a small crowd. We got curious and stopped there. Hesitantly we went up the slope to find out what was happening. It was a cremation going on there. The sight was frightening. The corpse of a man covered in a shroud was placed in a squatting position over a burning pyre made with stones covered with a huge pile of dry shrubs and some wood. There were a couple of young boys standing at a little distance from the crowd. I slowly approached them and asked them what was happening. One of them said in a whisper that it was a ritual detailing a cremation's lighting under the guidance of the Lamas. As there was acute shortage of firewood in the area the dead were cremated thus. We waited for a little while and then bowed and hurried back to our *Jhongas*.

After this depressing sight, we became pensive and did not talk till the ascent to the second high pass *Namikala* (The pillar holding the sky) started. The ascent was steep but we couldn't ignore the beautiful grey and green wave upon wave of the mountain ridges smooth as the backs of a herd of elephants. The *Jhongas* sped tirelessly till we reached the top that looked like a tableland. On the right, there was the interesting vertical rock already mentioned,

THE SECOND TRIP OF KARGIL

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the pillar as if supporting the sky. There were the typical colourful flags on which prayer charms were written in Tibetan characters, fluttering in the wind this time. It was a beautiful sight. The hastily recorded interview I had recorded with Sonam Norbo on my first visit, in which he had described how he had travelled all the way from Leh to Srinagar on foot when he had to go to England for his training, came to my mind. In spite of the hardship he had to undergo then, he was nostalgic about the romance it had within it.

After crossing the pass of *Namikala* the descent was somewhat smooth as the road was good and the gradient easy now. After a few hours, we were on the top of the highest pass on the road to Ladakh, *Fotula*, twelve thousand five hundred feet above sea level. The most conspicuous sight was that of the hundreds of very colourful buntings and flags with prayers written in Tibetan characters vigorously fluttering, on and around the huge monolith rock formation on the right spur of the mountain range, spreading messages of peace floating on the waves of the wind moving on to distant lands. When I stood near the rock and looked towards the land from which we had come and the land on the other side where we had to go, I got a feeling that nothing existed beyond the area covered by the spectrum of my vision there. The itch of a broadcaster came over me and covering the microphone with my thick jacket I recorded this feeling of mine in words that came flowing to me as the prayers written on the flags and buntings. A miracle happened or I imagined it happening. The howling of the wind did not distort my voice. It rather helped in creating the required mystique of the surroundings.

While we were still there, a group of Ladakhi travellers appeared from the road on the left that went down to join the road to another area of Kargil and the banks of the river *Suru*. It was a sight worth seeing. A dozen men and women driving a couple of yaks loaded with some bags, dangling on either side, with a couple of children seated on their backs. We had met a big contingent of pilgrims coming from the same direction going to the festival of *Hemas Gompa* in 1962 too, during my first visit to Ladakh. The scene of

the past was coming back to me, when our recording engineer Zutshi drew our attention to half a dozen sheep loaded with bags, like pack-ponies on either side, pulling themselves up the ascent. It was neither a surprise nor a source of amusement for me as I had seen quite a few such sights on my maiden trip to Ladakh. These mountain goats and sheep are used as beasts of burden too by the people in that area, because, they are sturdy mountain climbers with firm hooves as are their masters. We watched this group going out of sight for a while, bidding us 'Julle'. In the meantime, the howling of the wind had become frightening. So we were told to hurry up and board the *Jhongas*. As on my last trip, when the whole group hastily lined up for a photograph, the wind had become so strong that the pieces of rubble lying around had started flying with it. They could have hit us too. So we hurried and proceeded towards *Khalatse*, winding our way by the mountain of granite-like rocks at *Lamayuru*. This was the area where a large number of slabs of stone with fossilized leaves and sea weeds embedded in them had been found during the excavation for the road. The Geological Survey of India had surveyed the area and summarized that this entire area too must have been under water, God alone knows, how many millenniums ago. The formation of the rocks and mounds below in the gorge also testified to it. It is because of this huge stretch of landmass of mounds, pinnacles and spikes of ivory grey hue that Ladakh is also called *Land of the Broken Moon*.

After wading our way down to the village of *Lamayuru*, we walked and entered the *Lamayuru* monastery beautifully perched on top of a high plateau. Hurrying our recording there, we proceeded on our onward journey as the sun was moving fast towards the west. After a reasonably plain road we reached the famous *Hangroo Loops*, a feat of engineering. Again, the great Sonam Norbo came to my mind. His engineering genius is imprinted on every stretch of this road, one of the highest in the world. From the top at *Hangroo*, the entire road going down this very steep mountain right up to the *Khaltsie* rivulet, rushing through a gorge looked like a miles-long python lying in hibernation. Swinging at the innumerable

turnings we ultimately reached the rivulet. Travel from there was quite comfortable than it had been so far. It was night when we reached *Khalatse* with a dak bungalow still in the same condition that I had seen during my first trip to Ladakh. The search for the caretaker did not take much time. Seeing our PRO in uniform he, without grumbling, lit a hurricane lamp, prepared some dumplings of wheat flour and ample cups of salt tea for us. So, after having had such a royal feast we opened our sleeping bags and went to sleep in the two small rooms of the dak bungalow.

The next morning the caretaker, a chubby young man with an effeminate smile, somehow procured some eggs from the village nearby and prepared a lovely breakfast for us. So after topping our 'body engines' as the ever jovial Zutshi (peace be to his soul) our recording engineer would call our meals, we left for the villages of *Dah-Hanu*. As we started, I looked at the sturdy bridge of *Khalatse* that we had crossed the night before. And I again went down memory lane and felt the jitters I had earlier too felt in 1962. The swinging temporary bridge built for our crossing and the crossing of our jeeps - one at a time - came to my mind. The horror we had faced then has already been described. Now there is a solid bridge built there which again is a great feat of engineering. When Sati Sawhney and I narrated that horrifying experience, Maini Sahib and our recording Engineer could hardly believe it. Not only they, even our PRO Major Bhradwaj, had to be convinced that we had crossed that bridge of ropes and planks and that too when light was failing.

Wondering what a feat of engineering this bridge without a central prop was, we proceeded to the far-off destination, the villages of *Dah* and *Hanu*. These two villages, secluded against any foreign infringement in their very well-preserved culture, are very close to each other.

We had been fed on information contained in different travel accounts written by Western travellers in the past about the gold digging ants along the banks of the river Indus and the purest of the pure Aryan race living in some villages in north Ladakh. The

road was still being developed and hence not all that comfortable. In addition to that, there was the fear of the ferocious river Indus hardly a few feet from the edge of the road, rushing and roaring in the gorge hundreds of feet below to our left. The road gradually started going down the height and reached the level of the river near the village *Gurgurdoo*. From there we saw a row of burrows along the sandy banks of the river dug by big rodents. There were quite a few of them even at that time busy in their job. A little distance away from the river we saw some farmers who stopped their work when they noticed us approaching. We stopped to talk to them. Luckily a couple of them could speak Hindi. They told us that when the river was in spate these burrows would get inundated and when the water receded, these burrows would get filled with the sand that the river had brought with it from Tibet and from there it flowed into our territory. Some other villagers too joined in and told us that in olden days, people would sift this sand and the lucky ones would find grains of gold in it. They, however, told us that that was a story they had heard from their elders. Whether it was a fact or a myth they did not know. Anyway that solved the myth of the gold-digging ants of Ladakh..

Eager to reach the villages of *Dah* and *Hanu* before sunset, we hurried and did not stop at the village *Gurgurdoo* for long. We were amazed to find that this village not far away from *Dah*, had one hundred percent population of the Mongoloid race while the people of both *Hanu* and *Dah* belonged to the pure Aryan race. The dress and culture too were poles apart. How different it was had to be assessed after we landed in *Dah*. We were lucky to reach there with the village still bathed in sunlight. From a distance it looked like a dreamland with smoke rising from the hearths of homes looking like golden clouds, floating through the apricot trees. The muslin of this golden mist was hovering over the huts too. The army contingent, posted on the border there, had already received the signal about our itinerary. A few officers were waiting for us. They had organised a village-fair there, in an open space overlooked by the mountains that surrounded us. Singers and dancers from

Hanu too had been invited to join.

Dah is a small fertile village where wild rosebushes of various colours are everywhere in abundance. The evening breeze was laden with their fragrance. There were bunches of marble shaped red chilies, glistening like small electric bulbs in the small patches of land which were neatly tilled. It was a sight to see a bevy of beautiful girls with angelic faces in their typical dresses of beige coloured wool with bright red, blue and yellow skirting lines and woven motifs. The leggings were tight as the fashion prevails in Himachal. Their typical headgear, decked with colourful roses and the dainty red chilies and feathers were totally different from even the nearby *Gurgurdu*. The ladies had treated goat skins worn over their shoulders like ponchos. The boys accompanying them, no less charming than they, were wearing their tunic-length coats of the same colour with tight trousers. Their head-gear of felt had colourful decorations of feathered plumes. It was really interesting to mark their well-chiseled noses and big beautiful eyes, some even blue. The people living in the nearby village of *Gurgurdoo* that we had passed by had typical Mongoloid features. When these girls belonging to *Dah* and *Hanu*, burst into song the mountains around, reverberated haunting notes. After the initial singing of a few couplets, the drummers took over and the boys and girls started to dance, keeping pace with the rhythm of the drums. They, with their dainty movements and light steps, created a unique mystic aura around them. The festivity continued till the full moon rose from behind the mountains. There was a *Bara Khana* organised by the army for us, the artists and the respected villagers of the area. *Angoori*, the special local wine brewed from grapes was served before dinner. Everyone without hesitation enjoyed the delicious drink. While drinks were being served I was lost in watching the moon sailing as if in a crystal clear sea. It looked so big, so luminous that I could hardly believe my eyes. Or was it the effect of the *Angoori*? Anyway, whatever it was, the view was mesmerising. The only distraction was the lighting arranged through a generator.

After the dinner, singers sang a parting song pleading not to

forget the land and the simple people living in it. It was a plea for us to visit again. With lots of hugging and countless "*Julleys*", the crowd dispersed. The officers saw the respectable villagers of *Hanu* off across the brook. And we were led to the army-mess near the inner line. Beyond this line which was some two hundred metres away, no civilian was allowed to set foot as that area was guarded by our defence forces. Beyond that was the area occupied by Pakistan. That was a time when even Ladakh was not open for tourism, especially for foreign travellers; we alone had got the permission to go right up to the no man's land between our defence line and that of Pakistan. The night was pleasant and the lulling effect of the *Angoori* being still there we slept well. We would not have liked to come out of our tents had not the bugles been blown to call the soldiers to wake up and get ready for the day.

Our programme for the day too had been fixed. We had to visit the farthest end of the Line of Actual Control called Cease Fire Line earlier, from where we could see the Pakistani pickets, if there was no mist. We were lucky and saw the contours of a picket. There was some movement there which the CO attributed to our presence. It was out of curiosity that they wanted to find out what was going on, on this side of the line. After doing some recording there, we returned to the mess to have our breakfast after which we walked back to the village *Hanu* where some elders had been called so that we could talk to them. Language was a big barrier but the school teacher turned out to be an excellent interpreter. I was terribly curious to know more about their ancestry, rituals and customs.

Before talking to the elders, the school teacher gave us a brief introduction to these colourful and joyful people. They were known as *Brokpa* and *Drokpa* and were ethnically different from Ladakhis. Though they too had adopted Buddhism as their religion, they had continued their rituals of their ancestors. They considered goats sacred and fit to be offered as sacrifice at the altar of their deities. They valued preserving the sanctity of their lineage. That was why they did not get their children married outside their tribes. And being not on the silk route and away from the world outside, they

had been able to preserve their purity of blood. While the teacher was talking to us, the people around, especially the elders kept on listening to him with eyes widened trying to understand what he was telling us. I was keen to listen to what they knew about their ancestry. They gave the same story about the lost group of Alexander's soldiers. Some old men protested and said that they were original Aryans. But another old man sang an old song with gusto and said that that is what we are. The teacher told us that, that song was one of the eighteen songs that are dearest to their hearts and which they sing at their festivals. They consider these songs to hold the key to the secrets of their history.

Changing the subject, we were keen on knowing what their youths aspired to do in life. They were surprised at such a 'silly' question, "Well, they will do what we, their fathers and mothers have been doing." They avoided talking about government service, but had great respect for the army. "You people cannot imagine how these jawans look after us."

Thus, our visit to those villages turned to be certainly fruitful, and we saw how the population of a few thousand *Dokpas* in this mad rush of materialism kept their tribe away from contamination in modern society. I do not know what must be the position now since much water has flown down the Indus during these three and a half decades. The area too has now been opened to tourists. Much has been written about Ladakh and the only pure race of these 'Aryans'. But when those radio documentaries were broadcast they had taken our listeners for the first time to those distant lands and areas that were forbidden to civilians.

Bidding every one farewell we travelled back to *Khalatse* and from there to Leh. Passing through *Nurla* and *Rizong* villages we reached the beautiful village of *Saspol*. A little short of the Government Horticulture Farm, a strong bridge had been built across the Indus. This had been a boon for the people living on the other side where, after travelling for a couple of hours one could reach the world famous *Gumpa of Alchi* which had attracted the attention of research scholars and archaeologists, especially in the

Buddhist world. Reaching this famous Gumpa of Alchi in broad daylight was uppermost in our minds, because I had read that the interior of the *Dukhang* the sanctum sanctorum would be fully lit only at noon. And as God had wished, we did reach *Alchi* much before noon. We entered the village and contacted the village headman, without whose help we would not have been able to find the lone *lama* from the *Likir* monastery, who was looking after the upkeep of this oldest of *Gumpas* built between the 11th and 12th century. We were told that the *Gumpa* was abandoned for regular ritualistic worship a few hundred years ago but was considered a prized possession by the Archaeological Survey of India and the Buddhist world.

We, the headman, and a few villagers followed the *Lama Sahib* who had the keys to the monastery. When he opened the door of this temple complex the first thing that attracted my attention was the huge log of deodar in which a row of even steps were hewn right up to the top. This log was fixed to serve as the ladder going up to the upper floors. This log looked like shining ebonite because of the use of past centuries. We were wondering how this huge and long log had been transported more than a thousand years ago from Kashmir as the deodar trees did not grow beyond *Baltal* in Kashmir. We asked the Lama and the elders of the village. Nobody had the answer nor were chronicles recorded of this jewel hidden within this ancient structure of unbaked mud bricks.

As soon as the door of the main hall of the main temple opened, we were overawed by the tall and imposing statue of *Manjushri* (Buddha of Wisdom) standing there, wearing glowing robes, and adorned with semi precious and rare gems. It was so tall that our height could reach only up to the lower portion of its legs. We had to crane our heads to watch it reaching almost to the second floor. While we were looking up we saw an aura created by a beam of sunlight falling straight on the statue's crown glittering in a golden hue. The *Lama Sahib* pointed to the small window in the roof above from which this beam of sunlight was entering the *Dukhang* and lighting the head and the face of *Manjushri* and then spreading

over his shoulders to reach the floor. The *Lama* then, as if in ecstasy stretched both his hands and turned towards the walls, and moving his hands, pointed to the mesmerizing mural of hundreds of Buddhas painted in *Padmasan* in hundreds of identical circles. The whole of the *Dukhang* was a feast of colours creating an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity. You could see the influence of the ancient art of Kashmir vividly in these frescos. The *Lama*, in his interview, told us that this monastery had been built by the great Buddhist monk *Nono Rinpochey* of Kashmir, some eleven hundred years ago. I was keen to know what his original name might have been. He did not know. "Well that was his name. May be he had some *Khachulpa* name. But for us he was *Nono Rinpochey*." We were told by the headman of the village that *Khachul* in Ladakhi meant water and *Khachulpa* meant those living in water. That is why they hailed us Kashmiris as *Khachulpa*.

While taking us around the complex we at every step found that those Kashmiri followers of Buddha had left an imprint of not only their art in the contours of the images and colour combinations, but also had left an impact of the Tantric aspect of Kashmiri *Shaivism* through symbols and diagrams in the frescoes and the colour plates. In neither the statues nor in the frescos did we find any trace of Tibetan art in *Alchi*, which we found later on in almost all the other *gumpas*. The features of the face especially the eyes and the noses were closer to the frescos of Ajanta. So, *Alchi Gumpa* is a testimony to the earliest history of the spread of Buddhism from Kashmir to Tibet and beyond.

As one delving in painting for a long time, I was amazed at the strength of line and the balancing of colours. The drawing was perfect and the expressions of the figures arrested with so much of passion that you forgot that you were watching clay mannequins. We could not believe that these magnificent statues had not been repainted or even retouched for these hundreds of years. The paint looked remarkably fresh. The paintings did need retouching at a few places. But nobody dared to undertake the work out of fear. They had tried it a few centuries ago but at that very time the village

was struck by a terrific cloudburst which had wiped off a major part of the village near the monastery. That was why nobody had dared to even think of it thereafter. This was what the old monk told us. This establishes the fact, that we must have had great painters in Kashmir in the past and they knew the art of making colours from vegetables, stones and even metal and mixed them with such oils and rosin, that their glow remained unaffected for hundreds of years. Mohammad Yusuf Taing, a lover of the great Kashmiri heritage, after his tour to *Alchi* told me, that they have a section of old paintings of Kashmir there in the museum in *Tashkent*, too. I am happy that Japanese film makers have filmed the entire interiors of this unique temple complex for research and posterity.

So, fully compensated, we travelled back and crossed the Indus and spent some time in the experimental horticulture farm at *Saspol*, on our onward journey to Leh. The next stop was the village of *Phyong* and the monastery there. Driving at a reasonably fast speed through the long dry plain raising clouds of dust and scaring flock after flock of the *Ram Chakors* (colourful partridges) that were searching for their feed under the dry shrubs and stones, we saw a small milestone on the left from where we had to take a turn, leave the highway to reach our destination, the *Phyong Gumpa*.

Phyong is a big prosperous village with big stretches of farm land bordering the cluster of houses with the *Gumpa* prominently visible from a distance. It was a sight worth seeing that ladies were tilling the fields of the monastery, while the men were leisurely resting under the shade of trees. The Head Lama had gone to Delhi on a visit. So, the officers of the garrison at *Phyong* had organised our tour to the monastery and its different departments in collaboration with the next senior most priest of the monastery. While walking through the corridors of the *Gumpa* we were amazed to see the administrative setup and discipline of the monastery. This was due to the division of labour amongst the *Lamas* who had dedicated their life to the service of their religious order. It was a sight to watch; young *lamas* barely in their teens getting educated and being trained in religious ritual practices. A big group was

being trained in playing different musical instruments that were an important part of the daily prayers and religious practices and rituals.

For me, the most interesting was the painters' workshop, where young and old craftsmen were busy painting big panels, mostly with traditional motifs for the new *Thikse Monastery*, that was being built to commemorate the first visit of His Holiness Dalai Lama to Ladakh. He was expected to visit Leh in a couple of years. We were shown how the paints were extracted from vegetation, dried peelings of walnuts, pomegranates, stones, pearls and metals like silver copper and gold. I was amazed to see how these metals were beaten and powdered and then turned into a paste by mixing oil and rosin with them. The *lama*, who was the master craftsman and in charge of the school, told us that only boys with real aptitude for drawing were selected, groomed, and trained in this *sacred* art. They were divided into different groups, keeping their inherent talent in mind, to specialize in different branches of this art, after they attained basic knowledge. Some would get training in figurative art while others in the decorative backgrounds, and yet some others were trained in painting motifs and symbols. After spending a couple of hours in this painting workshop, we were taken round the *Gumpa* and then to the private *Pooja Room* of the Head Lama.

This room was in one of the innermost rooms where no sound other than the chanting that sounded as if coming from some heavenly distance was heard. It was here that we interviewed the Lama who was now our host. He tried to impart his knowledge of the message of peace and solace for the entire world in the simplest of words. We were mesmerized by his soft smile which reflected his inner peace. It was nice of him to see us off at the main entrance, where we too turned the big prayer wheel, with *OM MANI PADME HUM*. We bowed to him and then drove back to the highway over to Leh.

When we reached Leh, the sun had set and it was getting dark. Checking of our papers and other documents did not take much

time as the checkpoint had already received all the information. From there onwards we were given an escort and led to the Alfa Mess where we had to stay while in Leh. It was a luxury to be there, after having travelled for so many days on dusty roads and staying in village huts and tents. We were informed that General Mahadevan, GCO, would meet us before dinner, which would be served at 8.30 pm. So we had a bath and got ready for the meeting with the General.

Major General S. P. Mahadevan was a delightful person, down-to-earth with no ego hassles. He made us comfortable and asked us which areas we had covered so far. We gave him a detailed account highlighting the creditable role the army was playing. He looked at us with a smile in his eyes, and said, "Who can know it better than the General commanding them? I wanted to know about the common man. You see, in spite of my best efforts, I seldom come to know them as human beings because there is always a distance between us on account of my position and the status of my officers. Don't mind if I tell you that I had instructed my staff that you must be put up in my mess. Not that you were entitled to a lesser accommodation but I too wanted to spend some time with civilian intellectuals. The position of a senior in the army is somewhat pitiable because the juniors have always to keep a respectable distance from the senior, more so if the senior is of the rank of a general. Life, because of this strict discipline becomes sometimes boring. So, relax and let us talk about matters other than those of the army."

General Mahadevan then threw away the mantle of a general and relaxed and so did we. He wanted to know when we could have the stereophonic system of broadcasting. Why don't we have a colour-television when it had been in foreign countries for quite some time now? The conversation then shifted to politics. "How can the Members of Parliament and the officers sitting in air-conditioned offices there in Delhi know what a jawan goes through, standing there, at an altitude of 18000ft. above sea level in winter, when even the day temperature is minus forty degree Centigrade.

Yes, they do join the army to earn their bread. But it is not their bread alone. It is the motivation they get during their training and the call of duty, and finally, their love for their motherland." He then narrated an incident.

"You see, we issue a quota of rum along with the evening meal to a soldier. In our canteen rum is sold at a subsidized rate of four rupees and seventy five paise a bottle. There was a hue and cry in Parliament over it. Members argued and said. "We, on one hand, propagate prohibition for the civil population and there in Ladakh and other areas we distribute rum to them and turn them into drunkards." Finally it was decided that a Parliamentary delegation be sent to Ladakh to assess the situation. It was the month of October, when I got the message that a delegation of MPs was coming on a tour to take stock of things here. I knew that their main purpose was to check the consumption of rum here and then recommend a way to stop it. So I issued instructions that the honourable members should be made comfortable and be provided all the facilities that soldiers and officers get under rules. No special bedding and no extra blankets were to be issued other than those that we get. To keep their rooms warm, the normal quota of firewood for the Bukharis too should not be increased. The delegation arrived and I received it with the honour that protocol demanded. I invited them over to dinner. Excellent food was served with no drinks. They were happy with the co- operation and the reception they got. They were highly impressed with our High Altitude Hospital where they were taken care of and got acclimatized to avoid respiratory problems. Thus happy and comfortable, and fully satisfied, they retired to their respective rooms. You must have marked that the temperature has a very steep fall here as soon as the sun sets. Night temperature starts freezing everything from October.

The orderly attached to every room had warmed up their rooms with the normal ration of firewood to which an officer was entitled. So they must have remained warm till the last embers in the *bukharis* died. But then their beds must have started getting cold. One of the

MPs, unable to bear it anymore, came out of the room. The alert orderly on guard outside saluted and stood to attention. The shivering MP told him to bring some more firewood for his *bukhari*. The orderly begged pardon and informed him that even the Commander Sahib could get only that much firewood sanctioned and not a splinter more. Looking helplessly at the orderly who was still at attention and that too in the open verandah, the MP asked him how he could be so alert and not shivering in that freezing cold. The orderly replied, "Duty sir. And thanks to the daily ration of a few ounces of rum. That keeps me warm and alert even in the freezing cold!" The General bent a little towards us and whispered, "The orderly did not tell us from where he had got some rum for the Honourable MPs that helped them spend the rest of the night comfortably. After that experience they wanted to fly back at the earliest. And once back they in their report wrote that the policy of issuing rum as a part of the soldiers' ration should not be changed."

That was General Mahadevan. He was again his real self when we discussed our itinerary with him. He remarked, "An arduous journey! So you are going right up to *Cheshul*. A beautiful area, especially along the banks of the *Pangong* Lake till the point we have the waters under our hold. You will see at what unimaginable heights our jawans are holding our fort. Some of the pickets are at an altitude of more than 18000ft. above sea level. We are spending nearly eight rupees for every glass of drinking water to reach there. Why can't we sort out things with China? But then you know China, don't you?"

He then gave us some valuable advice which fortunately helped us in our travel to *Cheshul* from Leh. He told us that when we would reach the eleven kilometer desert of *Loma Sands* while returning from the other route through *Karo*, which runs along the river Indus, we should follow only the beaten track through the sand and not get tempted to walk over to the half sunk small aeroplane a little distance away on the right because, on that side, the sand that shimmers is quicksand that devours everything that treads on it." I can never forget those couple of interactions with

that remarkable commander of our army.

Sorry, for I am deviating again. When the memories of those travels come up, one is bound to get lost in sweet nostalgia especially when the thought of the mesmerising Ladakh comes to one's mind. All those travels shall become the main body of another book of mine on my travels in Jammu and Kashmir, other parts of our vast county and the countries abroad which I visited. So, carrying on with the radio documentaries I had the good luck to produce, we travelled to *Cheshul* after recording in almost all the *Gompas* including the famous festival of *Hemis* the magnificent dance dramas of the Lamas depicting the victory of Truth over Evil, then the *Stagna water works* that had been limping towards completion. En route to *Hemis* we visited the *Palace of Stock* where the old Queen mother took us round her little but valuable 'Royal Museum'. From there we went to see the Marino Sheep Breeding farm at *Matho*, some eleven kilometers from Leh and to record Dr. Wani the Director of the farm who was doing a great job. His experiments of crossbreeding the hefty Marino sheep imported from Australia with the local stock that was short but strong had proved to be a great success.

The onward journey to *Chashul* via *Changla Pass* (18,000ft) was a long and boring one till the foot of the *Changla* mountain, but for two interesting incidents. Driving fast on that seemingly unending and plain road with not a soul visible anywhere we suddenly noticed at a distance - as far as the eye could see - a big blot of black moving away in the sun. In the light of the sun high above and due to the refraction of the rays on the black top road, it looked like a phantom. But when we reached closer we were intrigued to see an old man in the traditional Ladakhi dress walking on foot leading a pony, on whose back was seated a small boy with rosy cheeks hardly six or seven years old. We stopped our *Jhongas* and got down.

The old man's face was all wrinkles, shadowed by the rim of a big British felt hat, surprisingly well preserved. We wished him with the customary "*Julley*." He took off his hat and bowed a little,

replaced his hat and smiled, with his eyes disappearing into his wrinkles. Turning to the boy sitting on the pony he said something in Ladakhi to him. I could pick up only one word and that was "Julley". The old man must have told the boy too to salute us because the boy immediately uttered a *Julley* in a sweet shy voice. The old man could understand Hindi and surprised us by sprinkling his conversation with some English words too in it. It was a remarkable opportunity to record a seemingly interesting traveller. He became curious when we took out our equipment. On my asking him if he would like to be recorded he readily agreed. I led him to the shade of some shrubs near the road and talked to him while his horse was nibbling at the shrubs.

This old man named *Tashi Wangpo* belonged to the village *Sakti* in the vicinity of *Karo* on the way to *Changla* heights, a few kilometers off the road on which we were travelling. He didn't remember how old he was and proudly pointed to the felt hat on his head and said that it was given to him by the Bada Sahib called *Mandar* Sahib. He burst into laughter while saying this, "That was a nickname. His original name was Temple Sahab, a big officer whom I served as a porter and guide too for many years when he travelled to Tibet from this side and to *Zanskar*, on the other, great man, indeed, he would give a lot in *Bakhshis* when we entertained him with our songs and dances. That was when he broke his journey in between. After his last travel in our area he presented this hat to me and said, 'Tashi Le you looked after it well. That is why it looked so shiny. Keep it. This will remind you of me, whenever you put it on.'" He again smiled and looked at us. "See, it still looks new. I am wearing it and am talking to you about our Temple Sahab. Wasn't he right?"

He was talking about Sir Richard Temple who was later on Assistant British Resident in Kashmir. Better known to us Kashmiris, as the collector of *Laleshwari's Wakhs* I asked him how old he was at that time. "My father, with whom I was going for the *Sahib's* service, would say, that I was about ten or eleven then." I thus roughly calculated, and told Maini Sahib, who was watching

him talk, that he must be nearly ninety-five. Though all wrinkles, he was still fit and sturdy. When asked from where he was coming, he said, "Had gone to *Hemis* to show this boy, my great grandson's baby, the *Mela*, and make him pray there. Perhaps it is my last *Yatra* who knows." He burst into laughter again. He then sang a song in praise of the *Hemis Gumpa*. We gave the boy a packet of biscuits and the fee *Tashi* had earned. We packed up and hurried on to continue our journey.

The *Gompa of Sakti* too was on our itinerary and it became our next stop. This *Gompa* is important for two historical events. It is there where the *Lamas* took to arms in the past and joined the people in defeating the Dogra warrior General Zorawar Singh. Second, there are two hands of one of the most celebrated *Kushaks* of the past, mummified and preserved there.

We met in the village the richest man of the entire area of *Karo*, *Changla* and *Darbuk* on the other side of the *Changla* pass. He had earned all his money during the construction of the road to *Karo* over the *Changla* Mountain and beyond, by executing the contract of supplying labour that he managed to bring from Bihar and Orissa. He had stocked the banknotes he earned in big gunny bags. There was not much in that area, on which people like this headman of a village, could spend money, except some grocery, matchboxes and some cakes of soap.

The PRO attached to us from Leh onwards told us that the man had once sent an application to the Commander at *Darbuk* to depute some officers who would count the money stored in the bags. He further told us that the man had a daughter whom he wanted to marry off to an army officer, to whom he would give all the money as dowry. But the condition was that his future son-in-law should live with him and spend his entire life there. Lot of time has passed since then, so we don't know whether he succeeded in his mission or not.

The road ahead continued to be smooth and in excellent condition but was completely deserted. Beyond *Sakti*, there was no village worth the name in that wilderness. The towering *Changla*

Mountain, eighteen thousand feet high from its base, appeared to be piercing the sky above. It looked like an invincible challenge to cross it. But when we started to scale the ascent, the gradient was easy, to our relief. Satyapal Sawhney had shifted to the *Jhonga* in which Mr. Maini was travelling at Sakti and the PRO moved into mine. Making him comfortable took some time. Because of that delay, we were left behind. The road being very good they sped away. In order to catch up with them our driver too accelerated and we were almost flying. After a while there was a blast and smoke started coming out of the bonnet. It was the hosepipe that had burst and clouds of hot steam emitting from under the hood of the *Jhonga*, engulfed us. There was nothing visible around. We managed to get down somehow. The driver did not dare look at us. The hosepipe having burst was now beyond repair. The PRO, consoling him, asked whether he had a spare hose pipe. The driver nodded and said that he could fix it only when the engine would completely cool down. So there was no other way out but to wait.

We looked around and then to the road going down. The weather was crystal clear and we could see the entire road till the point from where we had started going up. There was not a soul, nor any vehicle in sight. The heat of the sun above was scorching and we were forced to sit on the road under it. Suddenly, a hawk appeared in the sky. It swooped down very close over us and gave out a horrifying hoot. Then, as if they were waiting for his call, dozens of hawks flew in and began hovering over us. The driver shouted, "Sir, sit in the *jhonga*. They are very dangerous." We rushed to the vehicle. But the PRO stopped us and took out his pistol and shot at the hawks. Probably the bullet hit a bird, because one of them went down trying to soar again and then got lost. By then, the engine had cooled down and the driver had hurriedly changed the hose pipe. Thus having saved our lives, we continued our journey towards the summit of the *Changla*. One can imagine what would have been our plight had the driver not had a spare hosepipe.

It was nearing dusk when we reached the top. There was a military post there which gave us hot cups of tea and some biscuits.

They told us that our other *jhonga* must have reached the Brigade Head Quarters at *Darbuk* by then. The jawans at the picket briefed our driver about the direction of the road and told him that it was going straight right up to *Darbuk* and we should have no difficulty travelling in that darkness. I was boiling with anger at the behaviour of our other group for its members had not cared to stop in between and wait for us, but I suppressed it till we reached *Darbuk*.

It was past midnight. The Army Mess was almost in complete darkness, except for the lantern near the bar counter. Nobody, except a jawan at the bar and an officer sitting on a sofa was there. As we entered the room the officer stood and greeted us and introduced himself. He was the Brigade Commander himself, still awake and doing his duty. He informed us that the others had developed some breathing problems and he had sent them to the makeshift hospital a short distance away. My wrath disappeared and I became worried. Seeing me worried and in depression, the Brigadier assured me that they were all right and must be resting. Some food was brought for us. But in spite of being famished, I had no heart to eat. We ate whatever we could and then went to our rooms. I could not sleep for quite some time. But then fatigue took over and I fell asleep.

The orderly woke me up when he came in with my bed tea. It was from the orderly that I came to know that the other members of the team were all right and getting ready. My worry was over and my annoyance again raised its head. I also got up to get ready to join them. Maini Sahib, besides being the boss, was a dear friend. So, after inquiring about his health, I expressed my anger about their last day's behaviour. Satpal Sawhney apologized and said that it was because of his breathing difficulty that they had to rush. Since we were there safe and sound, we had our breakfast and left for the monastery at *Chimrey*, which we were scheduled to visit that day.

It was hours and hours of driving through a deserted land with no distinct road visible. In between, after a few miles, we could see a small cluster of a few huts and then another one. This was the atmosphere, till we reached our destination. As soon as our *Jonghas*

were about to reach a village, boys and girls would come running and keep shouting "jullay" and beg for matchboxes. A matchbox in that desolate place was one of the most valuable commodities. Throughout that arduous journey, I kept on thinking what had forced these people to live there, and how they all seemed to be contented as they greeted us with a smile. Even while talking, they would start giggling at the slightest provocation. In spite of hardships, they loved their land and sang its praise. Even their folk songs were full of this adulation.

The monastery was visible from a distance not because it was a big structure, but because there was no other such building around. This is the only Buddhist monastery in Ladakh where the female Lamas called *Chomos* live and manage the affairs of the *Gumpa*. The overall charge is of course in the hands of a male *Head Lama*. Seeing the army officer who had been deputed to escort us from *Darbuk*, with us, we were received with great respect at the threshold of the *Gumpa* and were offered the traditional *Khatak* (the muslin scarf). That is the respect and affection our army jawans were getting everywhere. Being in a desolate area away from any semblance of the modern world the conditions must have been considered as normal of these ladies who had dedicated their life to the service of the order and the Lord. They survive on the *grim* (buck wheat) they themselves grow in the fields attached to the monastery. There was not much difficulty in recording their experiences and routine of their work as some of them did speak Hindi because they had gone to school in Leh before they became *Chomos*. It was really a moving sight when they brought some *Gurgur* tea and *sattu of Grim* (churned salt tea loaded with butter and roasted grim, ground into flour). I could see motherly affection in their eyes while they poured the tea in the typical Tibetan cups for us, probably dreaming of the family life they had sacrificed. It was a unique experience. After spending quite a few hours with the *Chomos* and the *Lamas* there, we rushed back to *Darbuk* as our next day's schedule was a long one.

The road from *Darbuk* to *Cheshul* was under construction,

therefore very rickety and for many miles over broken boulders and rubble. We were worried about our vehicles. If something were to go wrong with them, we would get stuck. We had left the Brigade Headquarters far behind and *Cheshul* was still miles away. While we were thinking about it, suddenly all our attention was drawn to a hard rocky ridge in front of us, which had been hewed in the centre, making a gap for the laying of the road. We asked the drivers to stop. The view of a clear sky, spread over snow-covered peaks of mauve mountains, reflected in the indigo water below was so fascinating that we wanted to get down and walk to see what would be beyond this rocky ridge. As soon we crossed over, we were dazed and for a few moments could not utter a word. I was completely overwhelmed by the sight and felt that time had suddenly stopped and A Supreme Power had revealed the mystery of His being. Lost in that daze I looked around and saw that the expanse of water was spread as far as the eye could reach. "So this is the mysterious *Pangong Lake, Pangong Tso* for the Ladakhis on which every chronicle had showered heaps and heaps of praise". While I was recording and describing the view in front of me and S. P. Sawhney was busy with his camera, a whistling sound emerged from a distance and gradually became louder. It was the wind coming through the mountain peaks. With that the water in the lake that was still as a mirror started moving and ripples began appearing on its surface. God! What a display of changing and merging of blues, greens, mauves, whites and grays, small waves following each other like lovers chasing their beloveds in ecstasy.

It started getting cold as the sun started reaching the west. We had forgotten the world when the chill in the air suddenly reminded us that we were at an altitude of fourteen thousand feet. One of the drivers came and requested us to hurry up as his headlights had started misbehaving. So we hastened to the vehicles and moved on along the bank of the lake up to our boundary in the waters.

I have forgotten to mention here that the lake has a length of about 130 kilometers of which only 50 kilometers are with us and the rest are with China. The drive of about eight kilometers along

the water of the lake was quite smooth. The entire area was prohibited at that time and talking about the Pangong Lake then, was like talking about an alien fairy land beyond the reach of the civilian population. But now you see it in every second Hindi film thanks first to the opening of Ladakh to tourism and then to Amir Khan's film *Three Idiots* now there are *pucca* roads everywhere.

Coming back to those old days, all those travels we had undertaken, thanks to Radio Kashmir, were not only quite challenging but daring too. We travelled by all modes of transport. We travelled in every type of locomotive besides horses, pack ponies with wooden saddles, cavalry mules, and even yaks, at times also risking our lives. That was the passion to make the programmes of Radio Kashmir Srinagar programmes to stand out. Some of the other experiences will follow when I finish with our journey through Ladakh.

As we left the boundaries of the Pangong Lake, the surroundings changed completely. The land was rocky and dry. I was wondering over the irony of fate of this area, where, there was so much of water in the lake, but not a drop of it of any use, because all of it was brackish. As evening approached the birds hovering over the lake, wild rabbits, restless rodents and desert partridges had started returning to their nests and burrows. Darkness was fast spreading. Our driver was trying to conserve the power of the battery and drove using the dim parking lights, driving almost blind.

We were dozing when suddenly he gave a frightened cry and abruptly applied the brakes. The vehicle would have collided with the rocks had he not managed to hold it back. I looked at him and asked what had happened. He gave a frightened look and pointed to the wind screen "Ghosts!!.... There!!!" The frame of the screen was covered with sparkling tiny green lights. "Hey man! Don't get scared. Switch on the head lights." It was a pack of wild rabbits which had got dazed when the strong glare blinded their eyes. It looked like a freeze frame in a film. We laughed and I joked, "God! See! How many ghosts together!" The driver too gave a peevish laugh, waited a little, and then started the engine. I asked the driver

to put off the lights for while. And when he switched on the lights again the rabbits had vanished. It was a great break from the boring journey. So, teasing the driver and laughing and joking we proceeded towards *Cheshul*.

The driver, after the 'encounter' with the rabbit 'ghosts' did not want to take the risk of driving with the headlights switched off. It was because of this that the battery gradually started getting drained off. After having driven for a couple of hours the headlights started blinking and finally went off. We were now in real trouble. None of us had the slightest idea where we were and how far *Cheshul* was. To make things move we asked the driver of the other *Jhonga* to lead so that our '*jhonga*' sans lights would drive safely, following him.

There was pitch darkness all over the area with not a single village or a hut visible anywhere. It was around two o'clock when we ultimately reached an army camp a short distance from *Cheshule*. A junior officer was waiting there for us. It was here that our *Jhonga* stubbornly refused to move. So, it was decided that we should transfer to this young officer's vehicle and leave the *Jhonga* and the driver there, and move on to our destination.

A bunker-like hut had been fixed for our stay that was insulated with a parachute cloth against the piercing wind and cold. Why a parachute? In spite of our fatigue it intrigued us. Anyway we were served some baked beans, naturally a tinned dish and some bread, after which each one of us slept like a log. We woke up when the orderly came with the bedtea. The steaming tea was welcome but it became lukewarm when poured into our mugs, turning cold within no time. It was almost broad daylight when we finished our tea. The orderly informed us that the Commanding Officer had gone on leave and Capt. Chopra was holding charge and wanted to meet us whenever we would be ready for breakfast.

Capt. Chopra walked in, when breakfast was being served, and apologized for the inconvenience we had faced because of the breakdown of our vehicle. Captain Chopra, a very charming young officer who was the Officiating Commanding Officer, had fought

in the 1971 war in the *Pratappur* sector of *Noobra*. My son-in-law Col. Narendra Kalia, (God bless his soul) a captain at that time, was fighting the Pakistanis in another sector there. This created a sort of a bond between us and Capt. Chopra, who looked after us with unbound respect and affection.

The curiosity about lining the huts with a parachute still niggled. So I put this question to him while interviewing him after breakfast. "Sir, it is a show of luxury that we have here!" he joked and laughed. He then explained how they had so many parachutes there, lining their hutments. "You probably do not know that till the time there was no proper road, all the supplies to this far-flung area were air dropped, mostly through these parachutes. And refolding them manually was a tiring process. That is why they were left behind. There was an air-strip too here earlier. But it was abandoned in the Chinese war. The strip is still there. I shall take you there, when we go on a round tomorrow. In the absence of a road the country had to bear that heavy cost for its security. But we did not discard the dropped material, as junk. I'll show you how we use all the discarded stuff besides these parachutes fruitfully. These discarded parachutes have insulated dozens of our huts and bunkers against the cold, especially in winter, when even the day temperature dips down to less than minus forty degrees centigrade. Thank God that we have got a road now. It is not only the parachutes, but also lots of other things that we don't discard and put to use. You must have seen lantern-lights lit everywhere, in fact they were empty beer bottles filled with kerosene oil whose caps had been pierced and long wicks inserted. When lit they emitted a smokeless flame. Even the tins of canned food are not thrown away, but suspended throughout the lengths of our barbed wire fencing which strike each other creating a noise, alerting those on guard, that some intruder is trying to enter." He gave us a long list of such discarded things that they utilized for different functions. It only civilians too would think of such innovations and utilize discarded things productively.

The driver of our *Jhonga* too had reached *Cheshul*. He came to

inform us of a major trouble in the vehicle. A message had been sent to the Brigade Headquarter at *Darbuk*. They had promised to send another vehicle with a mechanic. So, our schedules had been upset. It meant a delay of three to four days in our journey back to Leh. Capt. Chopra was happy that he would enjoy our company for a few days more. You cannot imagine how these bravehearts, who are guarding our frontiers, crave the company of those who come from the plains on a visit. This mishap turned out to be a blessing in disguise for us too. This delay gave us a lot of valuable material about life there. The Captain drove us the next day to the war memorial of those valiant men who had laid down their lives in the '62 Chinese war to stop invaders from marching ahead.

After paying our respects to those martyrs, and recording the headman of *Cheshul* village, who had seen action there, we drove to the old air strip. Here, we were surprised to see hundreds of empty and rusting petrol cans in heaps. The lifting and transporting of those cans which had been emptied of petrol during the war there would have cost a fortune. So they were left to rot. Driving us through the plains, the CO told us that he was taking us to the *Gateway of India*. We were intrigued.

After a few furlongs the captain asked us to alight from the jeep. We got down and he led us through thick bushes and pointed to two concrete pillars ahead of us. These pillars were hardly five or six feet high. "Sir, this is our Gateway of India. This is the line where our territory ends and a few steps beyond starts Tibetan land which is now part of China. While we were moving away from the '*Gateway of India*' Capt. Chopra suddenly pointed towards the foothill on the left, "Look there, the wild horses!" he said. We turned to look. They looked like a long row of dry bushes. The Captain pressed the accelerator and in no time we were amidst those beautiful creatures. There were scores of them. All chestnut brown with similar white foreheads, short manes and tails more like those of mules rather than of horses. They got scared at our intrusion and took to flight as if on wings. Captain Chopra followed them at full speed. But he could not catch up with them. Before we

could reach them, they had crossed over into Chinese territory with no need for either passports or visas.

The other groups of people that are not bound by the demarcations of nations are the nomadic tribes of shepherds and yak herds. We saw a small cluster of their half oval-shaped tents a couple of kilometers away on the same trip. These nomads pitch these tents while travelling between the Tibetan heights and the plains of Ladakh on this side. We could not resist the temptation of driving there to meet these shepherds.

When we reached there, the first thing that attracted our attention was their tents. They were spacious and made from woolen cloth woven with coarse threads of yak hair. These men were quite tall compared to the Ladakhis. Even their dress was different. Their womenfolk too were robust and hard working. They were meat eaters and would collect the mountain goats' blood and then freeze it in the treated guts and preserve it in the form of sausages and cook and eat it all whenever the need arose. We recorded their songs which were in praise of their tribal chiefs and their livestock. The singing was quite haunting.

Another blessing of this vehicular breakdown was that we got an opportunity of attending a wedding in the village to which some of the army officers had been invited. We reached the outskirts of the village when the *baaraat* from the other village had just arrived. We were surprised that there was no bridegroom with the *baaraat* but a young boy, well-dressed and who was supposed to deputize for the groom. According to custom, he had to wait at his house to receive his bride. Both sides were carrying quite a few pots of 'chang' the local beer. First, the girl's side offered a beverage to the *baaraatis* and sang songs of welcome. Then this courtesy was reciprocated by the boy's side. This continued for some time, after which, the procession moved to the bride's house. We hurriedly drove there. There were gallons of *gurgur* tea sizzling in a tent where the guests waiting for the *baaraat* were being served the concoction quite liberally. Everyone, except for the bride, ran out as soon as the *shehnai*'s notes and the sound of the drums, were

heard. She was sitting in a corner huddled like a bundle in a bridal dress.

We too joined the crowd. The marriage procession was led by the musicians and lamas followed by the young boy, deputizing the groom, on a horse. I took this opportunity to record the rituals explained by a school teacher, a relative of the bride's father. He said, "After the *pooja* by the lamas the boy will tie the *khatak*, the silk scarf round the head of the bride. After that the guests will be served a meal of Ladakhi delicacies, after which the most touching scene of the bride's departure from her father's house will come up. This departure procession shall again be led by the Lamas and the *damdam walas* (the musicians). The lamas, reciting the prayers of good omen, will scatter a residue of boiled tea, dust and dried muck over the road ahead to ward off evil spirits that may raise their ugly head with evil designs."

We followed the rituals. Once the bride reached the house of her groom, she was invited to enter the house. She held the door posing to run back to her father's village. The groom's mother rushed to hold her back and in a song assured her that she was going to be well looked after, just like her own daughter. She was offered money and many gifts. She then begged her to enter the house which was her home now. The ladies assembled there sang in her honour, offered her gifts according to their status and finally cajoled her to enter.

After entering the house, she was taken to the kitchen where the groom was waiting, seated on grains of gram spread on the floor in the shape of a tantric symbol. The lamas recited mantras and asked the bridegroom to tie a *khatak* round the head of the bride. Thus, they were declared husband and wife. In olden times the lamas would then ask the groom's brothers if any one of them would like to tie the traditional *khatak* around the head of the bride. If any of the brothers would do so he would also be married to the bride and would have the status of her second husband. Thus a woman could have even three husbands. After the rituals, there was a feast followed by dancing. We were tempted to stay and

watch the fun but we were scheduled to start our return journey early in the morning, through the *Loma Sands*. So after thanking the groom's father we left the scene.

The next day our drivers assured us that both the vehicles were again in top condition. We took Capt. Chopra's leave and left to cross the long plain of *Cheshul*. This being a plain surface the drivers sped fast only to slow down when we came across another group of nomadic yak herds with a large number of *Chanthan* sheep with sagging coats of thick wool. They were lazily crossing over to the slopes of the Tibetan mountains. They too, like the wild horses, needed neither passport nor visa except during border skirmishes which were then very few in this area.

Shrubs and thorny bushes, the only growth around, started thinning after some time, and the sands of Loma started thickening. Our vehicles began to slow down. We were in a real desert trying to follow tracks which must have been trodden God knows since when. While we were slowly moving through this eleven-kilometer long desert, the overhanging mountains on our right drew our attention. The huge rocks at the top had turned into a cluster of fissures. This was the result of the hot and piercing mountain sun showering on the rocks a barrage of infra-red rays during the day. Night came and they got contracted by the chilly winds of minus forty degrees centigrade. The temperature kept going down as night progressed. This expansion and contraction cracked the boulders of the mountain turning these broken stones finally into grains of sand which ultimately slid down to the ground below. That is how this land of Loma had turned into a desert. Just imagine! A desert at a height of fourteen thousand feet above sea level!

While we were busy talking about this incongruity of nature the driver slowed down and pointed to an object stuck in the sand at a distance. When we were nearing it we could decipher its outline. It sure must be the aeroplane that Gen. Mahadeven had mentioned. It sure was, when we stopped at the nearest safe distance. Only the upper portion of the plane and the half-sunk wings were visible. As we had a long distance to cover we did not stop there and

proceeded on our journey.

Our next stop was the army formation at *Kyari* on a tableland overlooking the Indus flowing down below. We were told that if we had time we could travel upstream and could see, though from a distance, the area from where this mighty river was entering our territory. We wanted really to go there. So we requested the driver to hurry up, which he did, saying that he too was keen to see the place. "Sahib, I have just three years of service left after which I shall go back to my village in Kerala. Where shall I get this opportunity then?" He increased his speed as soon as we left the *Loma sands*.

It was an exhilarating feeling when we saw silver sheets of water unfolding round the bend of the mountain and rushing down towards our land. Waiting there for a while, we returned along with its waters which had become gradually calm moving towards *Leh*. When we reached the road to *Kyari* we saw that the river was almost touching its banks. We stopped to freshen up with its water fed by virgin snows. The water was cold as ice. But we did venture to have a wash and remove the dust that had accumulated on our faces. We even laid a bet for dipping our hand and holding it in for a minute or more. Whosoever would succeed would win the bet. But none could do it. The water was freezing. As soon as we reached the foot of the tableland on top of which was the Army headquarters, an astonishing surprise awaited us. It was a covered structure just a little distance away from the bank of the river. When we entered the shed we were surprised to see that the place was foggy. It was the steam emanating from the surface of a spring there. The water of this natural spring was boiling hot. I had read about hot springs in the Ladakh region. But a hot water spring just so close to the freezing water of a river could not be imagined.

It was nature's gift for the army posted there. They had devised a system by which one could mix the required quantity of cold water with the boiling water of the spring and use it for bathing or washing. A young army officer, waiting for us, led us up to the officers' mess above on the table land.

The next day we were fascinated to see tankers coming up from the road carrying hot water from the spring below for distribution in the barracks. We also used that water for bathing. It wasn't boiling hot but reasonably warm. The temperature during the night had fallen to minus 35 degrees Celsius. The result was that as the water slid down from our bodies while bathing, it turned into ice all round. The orderlies would later on come with ice axes and break the sheets, would throw the pieces of ice away.

The day started with a meeting with the CO and other officers over breakfast who finalized our schedule for the few days we were supposed to be with them. We expressed our desire to meet the villagers around. An officer escorted us to the nearest cluster of huts. Men had gone ahead to work at *Stagna*, where work on the ambitious power project was in progress. There were of course some elderly men left behind to help the women in making ropes of yak hair. Almost every old man had stories of a journey across the border with Tibet, who had accompanied the old caravans to *Lhasa* or the foreign travellers going to Tibet. They cursed the Chinese who now had occupied the entire area of Tibet because of which trade had been stopped. When talking they would get lost in the memory of their good old days and regretted that those days of peace would never return. All of them expressed their gratitude to our army and said if the forces would not be there guarding our borders, China would have come right up to their land and made them its slaves. The women were shy but offered us some *chang* which we politely refused.

After returning to the mess, the day continued to be terribly hectic, recording the experiences of those officers who had fought the Chinese as junior officers and combat soldiers in 1962. They talked of their experiences while assessing the borders, especially during winters. They recollected the exercises they had organised in the extreme border areas, where there was very little oxygen, how they would sometimes get lost in snow storms and had to survive chewing icicles or some soft roots.

Days in those lofty mountains are short. We hurriedly wound

THE SECOND TRIP OF KARGIL

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up the day's work as they had organised a barbecue party for us in the evening. They had invited some *Ladakhi* musicians too. They told us that such occasional evenings were the only entertainment they had. Sitting round the fire the CO told us that it was the mating season for wild goats. That is why hunting them was forbidden. Otherwise we would have arranged a ram for the barbeque. So we had to be content with a wild boar. I had no regrets because I had read that meat of the ibex rams was tough and not that tasty delicious.

Our next day too was hectic but immensely rewarding. We were scheduled to go to *Puga Valley* across the Indus, crossing over the newly constructed bridge a few kilometers down the river from *Kyari*. As we started up the hills beyond which lies the *Puga Valley*, intermittent sounds of striking hard emerged that vibrated and re-vibrated all around. These were the Ibex rams fighting for establishing supremacy in attracting eves and securing their territory: an interesting sight to watch.

Both the combatants would recede to higher levels, not losing sight of one another. They then would scratch the ground with their hooves violently, a sign of a challenge. After that, they would charge at one another at full speed, strike their heads with all their might creating the blasting sound that we had heard from afar. They would then lock their horns till the intruder was defeated and made to run away.

After watching the scene for some time we drove on to *Puga*. The drive, after a couple of hours, was quite smooth and we came down to ground level. After a sharp turn, the scene before us was unimaginable. We were entering the *Puga Valley*, the valley of geysers: jets of steam shooting up from the belly of the earth with full force, going up to scores of feet towards the sky all around. The steam was so hot that one would get blisters if touched by hand. But the temperature being sub-zero the water drops it created immediately turned into ice as they touched the ground. Because of this, there was a sort of circular base of granite like ice pedestals as if supporting the columns of steam jetting out. It was fascinating

to see quite a few ducks and drakes hovering around these steam columns, probably trying to warm their bodies. This tremendous source of energy was being tried to be harnessed and made use of. But the cost of the transmission from that far flung area to the nearest village Karu was at that time very high. This had made the project unviable.

With that ended our first leg of tours in and around the border areas of Kargil and Ladakh. After editing and broadcasting the documentaries as a serial, we geared up to proceed on the journey to *Gurez, Tilel, Lipa Valley* and adjacent areas touching our borders in the north of Kashmir with Pakistan occupied land.

■■■

GUREZ & TILEL

Our first trip was to *Gurez*. We started this journey from *Bandipore*, some sixty kilometers from Srinagar and traveled through the enchantingly mystic valley of *Lolab* which had inspired *Allama Iqbal* to write the immortal poem *Vadi-e-Lolab*

'Paani tere chashmon ka ubalta hua seemab,

Aaey Vaadi-e-Lolab Aaey Vadiye Lolab'

(The water of your springs is bubbling mercury,

O ye the Vale of Lolab.)

As we had tied up with the Army headquarters at *Bandipore*, we had no difficulty in hiring ponies for the long journey to the end of *Gurez*. The team continued to remain the same under the leadership of Amrit Lal Maini with Major Bhardwaj as P.R.O. of the army, Sati Sawhney for research inputs and photography, Moti Lal Kaul, the recording engineer and I the producer of the documentary series. After staying the night in the dak bungalow by the river *Madhumati*, we started to make our ascent to the *Rajdhani Pass*.

It was a cool and beautiful morning and the angle of the panoramic view kept on expanding and nature's mesmerising beauty kept unfolding in front of our eyes every minute. That was the scene when we stopped and looked back in between. While going up and looking at the skyline above, we soon marked a cluster of colourful flags fluttering in the morning breeze. The sun was still mild and soothing when we reached the top. The view from there was amazing. The entire *Lolab Valley* and beyond it, the entire *Vullar Lake* was spread like a vast painting framed by the mountains

in front of us. The top is a small flat meadow with the 'dargah' of *Peer Baba*, the guardian saint of the area, pertinently prominent, almost in the centre. On tall staffs pitched around the enclosure colourful flags were fluttering. In the enclosure lay the saint's grave. These flags were the ensigns of the battalions of the defence services that had been passing by it while moving on their postings in the *Gurez* sector. The shrine was also looked after by them.

We took off our shoes and entered the enclosure to pay respects to the '*Mazaar*'. The grave was covered by a fresh green '*chadar*.' A miracle happened there. When we came out of the '*Mazaar*' I noticed a big white mushroom at a distance away from my footwear. I am sure it was not there when I had taken off my shoes. Or perhaps it was there and none of us had noticed it. I felt that it was a *Tabbaruk* (a gift) from the saint. Sati Sawhney laughed at my comment and cautioned me not to touch it because it could be poisonous or could have been a snake's egg- pouch. I did not heed his warning and plucked it from the turf on the ground and cut it into two. It was like a ball of cottage cheese. I cut a piece from it and ate it. It tasted great. Everyone wanted a piece which they got. They too liked it and looked around to see if there were some more. But Satpal Sawhney did not even touch it and was probably waiting for one of us to fall sick. But it was the saint's gift, how would we fall ill? We again bowed at the *Dargah* and rode away to go down the mountain on the other side.

The descent was so soothing with a cool shade of the pine forest overhead through which a stream of gurgling water was rushing down. This stream gave us company till we reached the small town of *Dawar*. A common man considers it to be *Gurez*, but the fact is that the entire valley surrounding *Dawar* is in fact *Gurez*. The first wonderful sight we got was of the triangular mountain '*Habba Khotooni hund Baal*' (the mountain of *Habba Khatoon*), which looked like a slice of the mountain cut as if by a knife so smooth on the side facing us. As many myths are connected with this queen-poetess *Habba Khatoon*, one that is prevalent in this area, is that she was a princess of *Gurez* whose beauty mesmerized *Yusuf Shah*

Chak, the king of Kashmir while on a hunting trip. He fell madly in love with her and honoured her by making her his queen. That was why this mountain was named after her. There is a spring too situated on the other side of the same mountain that jets out water through the rocks which is called '*Habba Khotooni hud Naag*' (Habba Khatoon's spring). Whether *Habba Khatoon* belonged to that place or not the fact remains that these two features do bear her name.

Another salient feature of this mountain is that two main rivers of the area come flowing from two opposite directions skirting it and then join each other at its feet. One is *Burzul Nala* now named by Pakistan as *Neelam Nadi* that comes from the Pakistan occupied area of Kashmir and the other, *Kishen Ganga*, coming from the *Tilel* side. The water of *Neelam Nadi* is turquoise blue and that of *Kishen Ganga* is murky. We were fascinated to see the two distinct colours flowing side by side for a long distance before merging with each other. It was a beautiful sight and we would have tarried there but the officer from the Border Security Force, who had to conduct us during our stay in *Gurez*, was waiting to guide us to the officers' mess. So we had to pull ourselves away from this beautiful scene.

After lunch we spent the entire evening in the village of *Dawar* where we interacted with the local people. It was a revelation that the men, by and large, spoke Kashmiri though with a slight accent as well as *Shina*, their mother tongue. The women, who had never ventured out of their village spoke mostly *Shina*, one of the main *Dardic* languages with a sprinkling of Kashmiri. With the spread of modern education, quite a few spoke Urdu and even English. Another interesting aspect we noted, while recording their marriage songs, was that most of them were Kashmiri '*wanavun*' melodies, sung as they were earlier sung in the *Bandipore* area with a mixture of chaste *Shina* in between to give them a local colour. So, the myth of some scholars that Kashmiri was basically a *Dardic* language was being eroded while we kept travelling not only in *Gurez* but also in the *Tilel* area. The people there must have had

social interaction with their relatives and friends in *Bandipore* their immediate neighbours across the mountain. This was evident from their marriage songs too.

When we returned to the officers' mess we had a pleasant surprise at dinner. One of the main courses was trout half fried in butter. On enquiring where they had got the trout from and that too so fresh, we were told that the waters around the *Habba Khatoon* mountain was the best habitat for the rainbow trout. When the Commanding Station Officer found that I was interested in fishing, he gave instructions to his aide to arrange for the required permission from the local authority for us, so that we could try our luck in netting some fish with our own hands. We got excited, particularly I, as I had gone fishing quite a few times with our former director P. C. Chatterjee, an excellent angler. So, it was decided that the next forenoon be fixed for the fishing 'expedition' in the waters of the *Neelam* and the *Kishen Ganga's* confluence around the foot of '*Habba Khatoon Baal*'.

The morning was bright and clear and ideal for fishing. The local official of the fisheries department had come himself with the permit and was kind enough to spend some time with us. He was a well informed person. So I recorded an interview with him too. I knew that except for the silver trout of the Indus's waters in Ladakh, trout was not a local breed and had been introduced by the British during the time of Maharaja Hari Singh who was fond of trout fishing. It is recorded that he would carry his stove, frying pan and butter with him when he would go fishing, as trout stales quickly and is excellent to taste when fried, rather half fried, in butter, when it is absolutely fresh.

I had read in old chronicles that there was a captain of the British army, a very enthusiastic biologist who had a survey map of the snow streams of Kashmir and had travelled to explore them. Finding the surroundings and quality of the water most suited to breeding trout, he had released the spawn in the waters in the *Lidder* and *Aru* in Pahalgam, the *Bringi* in South Kashmir and even in the waters of the *Aharbal* but nobody believed that he had travelled

right up to the source of the *Kishen Ganga* during his mission. This is what the fishery's official told us in his interview. That was the spirit of most of the British officers who had served the state during the Dogra rule. They not only concentrated on the job they were supposed to do but also engaged themselves in other activities of the socio economic development of the state. Whether it was Sir Walter Lawrence, the Neve brothers, Sir Richard Temple, R. L. Stein or Tyndale Biscoe and his son Eric Biscoe, they all contributed a lot to the development of Kashmir.

We were given two fishing rods of Japanese make by the commanding officer with some butterfly baits, and other required material used in trout fishing. Being the leader of the group, the best rod was given to Mr. Maini. I took the second rod. Sati Sawhney and major Bhardwaj were not interested and stayed back on the bank to watch the fun. Well, as you know, trout fishing is more of a sport than the killing of fish. We have to enter the water after casting the line to try to make the fish mouth the bait. Trout fish always take pleasure in swimming against the current and you too have to walk upstream and tempt it to follow the bright spotted small spoon attached to the bait hidden beneath the fly.

The rubble and the boulders in the water were quite slippery.

Mr. Maini lost his balance but managed to hold tight to the rock on which he was standing and did not fall into the rushing waters. Frustrated, he gave up and said that it was not a game for him. He handed over the rod to Moti Lal Kaul, our recording engineer. For Kaul too it was his first chance. But being young he cast his line and as luck would have it, a big fish got hooked. The official of the fishery department rushed to help and guide him. The fish was netted and landed. Frustrated, I was about to give up when I decided to cast my line for the last time. Fortunately, a bigger fish got hooked and dashed up stream trying hard to free itself. I had to walk quite a distance through the water when it was finally netted and landed. So, happy with our catch, we hurried to the Mess and had the catch fried, easily the most tempting item on the table for lunch.

The next day I left the Army Mess ~~Swamp~~ before sunrise with

Moti Lal Kaul the recording engineer as a huge '*Jirga*' (contingent of shepherds) arrived on its travel back to Kashmir from the meadows on the other side of the *Habba Khatoon Mount*. I, in my heart of hearts had been hoping that I might meet the remarkable *Gujjar* Chief, *Rajwali Khan*, whom I had met in *Buffliaz* in the *Rajouri* district during our coverage of the borders on the Jammu side of the state. But when, even after a thorough search amongst the shepherds I did not find him I was disappointed. Anyway, I started recording the adventurous experiences of these shepherds in the *Tilel* mountains from where they were returning. While recording them, I was intrigued as to why a big group of their men rushed to the foothills above, full of seemingly dry shrubs. On enquiring, we were informed by some local men who were watching us record, that they had gone to collect whatever *zeera* (cumin) that had remained there, in the bushes, after it had been harvested. I had forgotten that '*Gurez*' was famous for two main gifts it had got from Mother Nature. One was the world famous *shahi 'zeera'* and the other was an abundance of *tethavena* (absinth: a sort of bitter mint used as a purgative). Both these shrubs grow wild and their produce is useful even because of medicinal qualities. But with advancement of science they are now cultivated, and also cared for. It was but natural that the production had increased manifold. We finished our recording hurriedly and then travelled to the nearest point from where we could see pok.

Travelling on pack ponies along the '*Neelam Nadi*' was a beautiful experience. The area on the other side, though no match to our side, had its wild beauty too. We were told by the army jawans guarding the borders that it was a pathetic sight to see the villagers of our side watching helplessly the social events across the border on the other side, especially if it was a marriage in some divided family. The commanding officer of the area would show deep compassion, if some close relative of our villagers living across, passed away. He would make it possible for him to meet the bereaved family members, as close to each other as possible near the LOC to pay their condolences and share their grief. While

listening to such heartrending situations, I was so grieved that I cursed the day when our country had got divided. A foreigner country had come and planned to divide us lest we by remaining united grew to measure up to his height. And we, like fools, got taken in and burnt down our own house. And even now, after nearly seven decades, do not realise, what we had done.

The river *Kishen Ganga* has virtually divided the land mass of Gurez with the result, that if one had to go to *Tilel*, the other part of the same region, one had to travel a long distance around the *Habba Khatoon Mount*, then scale up its back side, take rest and then travel down into the *Tilal* valley. So, for making things easy for trekking and inspecting of the area the army had built a big crib type trolley which was manually manoeuvred by ropes and pulleys to carry people from one side of the river to the other. But this mode of transportation could not be of any use to the general public except in an emergency.

We had to make preparations for the long journey ahead. Ponies and porters had been already organised for us. So we embarked on this last leg of our recording expedition early next morning, carrying our packed breakfast with us. A signal had been sent to the defence personnel to organize our lunch in *Tilel* on the other side of *Habba Khatoon's Mount*.

We wondered at the miracle of water gushing out of the rocks like in *Koker Nag* in Kashmir, around the middle of the ridge at the back of *Habba's mountain*, from where it came down in a cascade which the locals called *Habba Khatoon's Nag* (*Habba Khatoon's Spring*). Moving ahead we reached the village earlier nicknamed *Tchoora Van* (the forest of thieves). This name was abhorred by the people living there and had therefore been changed to '*Tchera Van*' (the forest of apricot) It was pathetic to see the condition of the villagers there. The village was a habitation of wooden huts of grey and black. I am sure that the condition must have improved by now like the villages all over Kashmir which had made remarkable progress. Leaving the village behind, *Ali*, the remarkable porter-cum-guide, with a Hercules like physique and a charming

smile, of sparkling white teeth, led us into the forest beyond this last village.

Before I proceed further, I must give the readers a proper introduction to Ali, who would say that if somebody called him by his full name—Ali Mohammad he would get lost. "Ask anybody, sir, in the entire area of *Gurez* and *Tilel* where is Alia, he will directly guide you to me. Because there is only one *Alia* here, all others are *Ali Mohammads*." He broke into laughter. It was his self-introduction when we met him for the first time. He hailed from *Gujjran* the farthest village in *Tilel*. *Gujjran* and the adjacent village *Abdullan* were the two villages which had remained disputed, when the ceasefire line was drawn in 1949. Their fate was decided by a referendum under the supervision of the UN observers then, in which the populace of both these villages had opted for India. So, Alia had a historical link with the past as he belonged to one of those two villages. Besides that, he, as a registered porter with the army, had rendered memorable service to it for which he had been awarded quite a few commendations from the government. The most memorable certificate had been awarded to him for carrying an eighty pound gun on his shoulders to a picket at an altitude of more than eight thousand feet during the war of 1971. So it was not only a pleasure but also an honour to get him as our guide and companion while travelling into a terrain alien to us.

Seeing that we had started changing our positions in our saddles after every stride, while going up the mountain, he whistled to the horses to stop. When the horses stopped, he came to us and told us that as the ascent was steep it was better for us to cover it by walking on foot till the gradient smoothened. Continuous sitting in the saddles would stiffen our knees so hard that it would be difficult to walk even a few steps later on. Heeding to his advice, we dismounted from the horses and started on foot. It really was difficult to walk in the beginning because our knees had already been stiffened.

Probably it was with the blessing of Providence that we had to take an easier path through the deep forest, otherwise I would have

missed *Rajwali Khan* the *Gujjar chief* whom I had met in *Bafliaz* as mentioned earlier. Because of this second meeting with him the seeds of my novel (Sheen) '*Sheen Ta Vata Pod*' started sprouting. (This is the novel which got the Best Book Prize from the State Cultural Academy and the coveted Sahitya Akademi Award later on. Sahitya Akademi got it translated and published in Hindi. This was followed by my translation into English which was published and released by Tara Research Publications, India through book shops and Amazon.)

It was destined for I to meet *Rajwali* again here in the month of October at the foothills of the *Choocha Gali* pass on our journey from *Gurez* to *Tilel*. This time he was going up the hill on his horse along with a couple of other *Gujjars*. I wished him, but he did not recognise me. But when I reminded him of the interview I had recorded with him in *Baflias*, he immediately remembered and jumped down from his horse and rushed to my side. I too alighted from my pony. He held me in a hug and jokingly said, "So you have been following me!" After a casual talk in which I introduced him to other members of our team, he told us that it was time for their return journey and to prepare for it, he had visited the town to collect his rations etc. "Come, have your grub with me. Our '*dera*' is not far away. Come." When I, out of curiosity, asked him where his '*dera*' was, he turned to the mountain top to our right, from where a thick column of smoke was rising. "There," he said pointing to the smoke. "That is the hut. *Our Dhoka*, the hut of every shepherd who stops there for shelter." He repeated his invitation. I politely told him that our lunch had already been organised by the army at *Tilel*. Hearing this he gave a big laugh and told us that we could not reach there before midnight. "Anyway, don't worry. While crossing this pass you will come across a spring almost near the top. You must stop there for much needed rest. I shall come with something to eat for all of you." Making us promise, that we would, he jumped upon his horse like a Cossack and rode up the steep height and disappeared in the forest. Watching him merging with the trees we continued with our journey.

When we had covered more than half of the ascent, we did see the spring there under the cool shade of the pines. Tired and exhausted, we dismounted and sat down to take a breather. We were terribly hungry. When the recording engineer wailed that we had exhausted all the cookies we had, Major Bhardwaj who was accompanying us as the Liaison Officer teased him, "Don't worry. Pran Sahib's *gujjar* will be coming with a 'Wazawan'" (the full cuisine of Kashmiri delicacies). Everyone burst into laughter. After having had some rest there, as we were about to get up, one of our porters shouted, "He is there!"

We turned round and found that, it really was *Rajwali Khan* coming on his horse with a couple of *gujjar* boys riding after him. I looked at our Major Sahib who was feeling a little awkward. *Rajwali* seeing us almost ready to leave remarked in his jocular tone, "So you had thought this old shepherd had joked that he would reach here with some food for you?" Seeing that we were feeling humbled, he turned away and directed the boys, who had come with him to spread the sheet and take out the plates. He had brought baked paper-thin *naans* made from the finest corn flour, lumps of white butter, cooked greens of the jungle, and a potful of buttermilk. We were famished and this forest spread tasted better than the famous Kashmiri Wazavan.

The atmosphere in its entirety was breath-taking. The entire mountain slope was full of digitalis flowers (blue bells) in full bloom. It was a feast of varied colours I had never seen before. I sat to chat with *Rajwali* while the others walked around. When I asked him about his return journey he complained that it was more tedious than the journey to this side. I asked him, "Aren't you fed up of this type of life? Don't you want to settle down in a village somewhere?" He looked at me and put a counter question. "If I ask you to come and settle down here, what would you say?" I said, "I would love it. It is so beautiful here." "When these flowers wither and winter sets in, even then?" I had no answer. "This is our life and we love it. Even when we grow old and settle in a village, our children take up the job."

Rajwali was right. We reached *Koshur Tilel*, (the only village with the name *Tilel* with it) at almost midnight. Thank God they had not prepared our meals for lunch as was planned in *Gurez*. It had been wise of the young captain posted there, to have calculated the hours of our travel correctly. We were weary and after a quick hot meal went off to sleep.

In the morning, the first thing that I noticed after getting out of bed was that we were in a make-shift Army Mess. I quickly had a wash and prepared myself for the day. The recording engineer too, as a matter of habit, was up and ready. We both had a quick breakfast of '*poori bhaji*' and set out to survey the area and record whatever we found interesting. After coming out of the army camp, I found time had flown back into history and we were in a civilization of log houses. Our guide *Alia* was already in the village chatting with a few villagers who had gathered there. He must have told them who we were and why we were there, since they greeted us with a smile and led us to their houses. Almost all the houses were made of logs fixed one upon the other and secured by wedges cut into each log and then fixed one on top of the other. In this way four walls are erected which from the outside looked like two storey high. But within, they were houses of one and a half storey. The foundation is laid by digging a couple of feet deep into the ground and then filling it with stones without any mortar.

When I asked them if we could enter a couple of houses, they readily agreed and led us into one of them. The inside of the house was a big room on top of which was another floor but almost half as high as the ground floor. On the ground floor was the kitchen with the hearth that had been kept burning for almost twenty four hours with the outside being extremely cold. The other half was for the cattle. There was a small wooden staircase for going up to the half floor above. All the creaks in between the logs had been sealed with mud plaster. The women's dress was a long *phiran* stitched in off-white wool carded out of the fluffy coat sheared from the sheep they bred. But men wore modern dresses as they travel beyond the mountains around in search of their livelihood.

Most of them work as porters for the army. Though there were some government schools in some villages, most of the boys were school dropouts.

It was a shocking surprise that there were hardly any skilled labourers in *Tilel*, not to talk of blacksmiths, masons or carpenters. The main tool, with almost every household, was a heavy iron axe. This they used not only for cutting trees, chopping wood for their hearths, but also in cutting wedges and hand crafted joinery to build their log houses with excellent precision to fit one log securely with another. There is hardly any steel used in construction. The latches are made of wood and so are doors that fixed and operated upon pegs fitted in holes chiseled within the door frames.

As I was interested in finding whether their language had any linguistic relationship with Kashmiri, I recorded a large number of their folk songs which turned out to be all in *Shina*, the language they speak. There was only some resemblance to the wedding songs which did have some distorted Kashmiri words in them, though the melodies resembled our Muslim marriage songs, *wanavun*. Same was the situation right up to the village *Abdullan* and *Gujjran*, the villages at the extreme end of *Tilel*, the village where *Alia* had his home and wherefrom his wife too hailed. We were keen to see the lucky girl who had *Alia*, the dream of any woman as her husband. I am sure *Alia* was not himself conscious of his remarkable masculine attractiveness, for when we would touch upon the subject, he would blush like a girl. He would dodge and say that we should have seen his father, his uncles, in fact all the other people of his village; they were equally tall and robust.

Alia had a melodious voice and would break into song throughout our journey when travelling would turn tough for us. When we finally reached his village we were really amazed at seeing most of the men there, as robust and healthy as *Alia*, though not as tall as him. The clean fresh air, fresh corn flour, milk, and hard labour must have been their secret. When we enquired about his wife, *Alia* pointed to a woman carrying a huge load of firewood coming down the steep ridge, facing us. *Alia* did not want to

embarrass his wife, so led us to his house which was somewhat better than the other houses. He entered the house and bringing out a rug, spread it in the courtyard and requested us to be seated. By that time his wife too walked in. Alia rushed to help her unload the firewood off her back. He whispered something to her after which she quickly covered her head and coyly offered her 'Salam' and then hurried into the house. Though she was no match to *Alia's* charm she was equally well proportioned and had an innocent of her own.

Seeing some strangers and a military officer accompanying *Alia*, the villagers got curious and started pouring into the compound. *Alia* briefed them about our mission. There were a couple of old men who had seen the atrocities the tribal *Qabailies* had inflicted upon them. These tribals had killed many people and set their homes on fire in 1947. "It was because of experiencing their brutality and atrocities, they inflicted on us that we voted for India when there was a referendum here. It was because of some dispute Pakistan Army had raised with our Army about the demarcation of the ceasefire line. We alone did not take this decision, but the people of the adjacent village *Abdullan* too voted to join India where we would be safe and well looked-after." Said the head-man of the village, "*Shukur Allah-Tala Ka* that we took that decision, otherwise, we too would have been treated the way those unfortunate people living on the other side are." Another person remarked, "It is these brave soldiers who not only saved us from those barbarians but looked after our welfare too. *Jinab!* The civil officers seldom stay here long. We don't see their faces for months together especially in winter. It is these officers and these *jawans* who take care of us. Our rations get exhausted and it is they who distribute flour, sugar and salt from their own stores and do not charge us even a dime. It is they who treat our patients and teach our children. How can we repay them?"

Well, that was the situation in almost every village living almost in the line of fire from across the border of our state. We spent a couple of days in that area and visited some army pickets

overlooking POK and saw how difficult it is to seal our borders when we have range after range of high mountains and valleys in between.



MATCHAL VALLEY

The next leg of our tour was to the *Matchal valley*, another beautiful area in the northwest of *Gurez*. There are two routes to reach there. Both take off at *Kala Roos*, where there were copper mines hundreds of years ago which belonged to *Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin Badshah* the great king. It is recorded in history that he would meet his personal expenses with the income he got from those mines and would not draw any money from the public treasury. There is a cave there in that area which they say has the other end opening somewhere in Russia. That is why this cave as well as the area around is called *Kala Roos*. But this perhaps is only a myth.

One route to *Matchal* is via the *Choocha Gali* pass and the other one through the *Urre Gali* pass. The route through the *Urre Gali*, though shorter, is dangerously hazardous across a mountain of nothing but boulders and rubble stones. So, we took the longer route through a pine forest. Here again we saw huge pines fallen and rotting as we had seen in *Gurez* and *Tilel*; a forest wealth of millions and millions of rupees untouched. It was wasting there, because there was no road and therefore no transport to carry it to the markets across the mountain to the lumbering plants there. This area is almost cut off from modern civilization. That was the situation then, when we travelled to that area. It may not be an exaggeration to say, that if one needed even a match box, one had to cross the mountain and get it from the towns there. This we realised once we got settled there. Thank God we had ample stocks of battery cells for our tape recorders, otherwise, we would have

got stuck as there was no electricity there.

There was no army accommodation in proper Matchal. So we had to go deep into the forest where there was a state government forest hut. I asked the porters as to what village they were leading us to, "*Tsanthwal, Jinab*," replied one of them laying stress on the 'T'. "That is what is written in the army schedule too. But what do you the local villagers call it?" "*Ichoonthwole, Jinab*." We burst into laughter. "Fantastic! *Tchoont* our very dear apple had been turned into *Ts*." Though there were hardly any apple orchards there I did not understand why it was called the *apple wala village*. It was however sad that the army had to take the help of old British books of travel to hastily prepare the route maps for their use. As there is no sound of '*tcha*' in the English phonetic, the foreigners have used '*ts*' as the nearest substitute. Similarly in this very area, '*Ring Paeen*' had become *Ring pen* and '*Paanta Tchokh*' (the churning water) in Srinagar had become *Pantha Chowk*. It is sad that the common man too now uses these distorted names forgetting the original ones. If we cannot protect even the original names of our places, what is that *Kashmiriat* that we are constantly talking about?

The forest hut, though not normally in use was surprisingly neat and clean with a stream running nearby. We settled the accounts with the pony contractor who had rented out the ponies that had carried us there. He said that he had to return the horses to Bandipore as that was his contract with their owners. When we asked him how we would carry on with the journey forward, that man, who kept chattering and boasting continuously, assured us that he had already made excellent arrangements there. So, relieved, we settled down.

The keeper of the hut, *Lassa Joo*, turned out to be a good cook besides being a very pleasant old man. He had travelled as a '*khansaman*' to *Gilgit* in his youth with the *Maharaja's* guest, a British traveller. He hurriedly made sumptuous chicken curry and rice for our dinner for which we thanked him profusely for we had not expected such luxury in a desolate place like *Matchal*. It was

he who promised that he would collect a few villagers next day to meet and talk to us.

By the time we finished our breakfast the villagers, who had been contacted by *Lassa Joo* the previous evening, had collected in the lawns of the forest hut; most of them men and children. Some women too had gathered there, but were standing behind the trees some distance way, watching us curiously. I saw quite a few very old people too in the crowd. When I spoke to them in Kashmiri and talked to them about Radio Kashmir they looked at each other. *Lassa Joo* pointed out, "Sahib there was one radio set installed there in the village by the government a long time ago. It was of little use because we did not have electricity here and the battery they had given got discharged after a few months' use. That radio set has turned into junk by now."

This was another revelation. The purpose of our tour was also to check the reach of the signal of Radio Kashmir Srinagar in these border areas. We had found it very weak throughout. This was disturbing because the reception of the so-called Azad Kashmir Radio was loud and clear. Their broadcasts were malicious and a bundle of lies. We kept exposing their Goebbels type propaganda by projecting actual facts. But what was the use when these programmes hardly reached the listeners here? These areas were bereft of all the modes of communication and therefore of information too. We had prepared a report in this regard after the first leg of our tour, which had been submitted to the Ministry. Though we had increased the strength of both our medium and shortwave transmitters they couldn't work to full capacity because of the erratic city power supply, the frequency of which kept on fluctuating and seldom touched the full 220 cycle. This report sent by Radio Kashmir Srinagar was taken up seriously with the state government. But they were helpless because of poor power generation in the state. This deficiency was to some extent met by augmenting supply through diesel generators. How long would that temporary arrangement would have continued? I am sure the situation must have improved by now.

Coming back to the *Tchoonthwol* forest hut, I explained to the villagers that we had come to record their problems for broadcast over the radio so that people as well as the ministers and their officers become conscious and tried to redeem them. It was a delight to know that there were quite a few centenarians in the crowd assembled there. They however were not sure of their age and told us that they could check it with *Rehman Mir*, the oldest amongst them who kept track of years and months. A young boy in excitement jumped up, and pointing to the stream, said, "Look, he is there!" We all turned to the stream and saw a man with a loaded sack on his back wading through the water and coming towards us. On seeing the crowd there, he, in a loud and strong clear voice asked. "Hey what is happening there? All well?"

The caretaker of the hut *Lassa Joo* rushed to him and helped him in unloading the sack from his back and in the local lingua explained to him as to what was happening there. Having been informed that we had come from Radio Kashmir, he got excited and walking to us said "Good! Let me talk to them. I have to tell them something which they may not like." I was happy that he was quite articulate and could give us a good interview. We stood and greeted him with respect and made him sit by our side. "So you have come to repair the radio set you had sent some years ago? No use! It is nothing but a broken box now." It took some time to make him understand who we were and what our mission was. I introduced Maini Sahib to him who assured him that he would see to it that a couple of new and durable sets would soon be installed in the village. Seeing that he was not fully convinced, I changed the subject. "Mir Saheb, it is strange that these elderly men don't know what their age is. They told us 'let Rehman joo come, he knows it all. And when Rehman joo dies they will tell you to go to his grave to ask. Idiots! Why can't you keep track of your years? Now don't tell me, what is the use?'" Seeing that he was in his spirits I interrupted, "They say that you are the oldest man here." "Eldest, not oldest! Didn't you see what a heavy load I was carrying at one hundred and thirty?" Everyone was amused at the agility of

the old man claiming to be one hundred and thirty. We did not make him aware of the fact that we were recording him. I continued, "So you say you are hundred and thirty?" "Yes I am. Perhaps a few days more but not less." "How do you say that you are one hundred and thirty?" "You ever heard of Lawrence Sahib?" "Yes, who hasn't? He did the *bandobast* of land in Kashmir during the Maharaja's time" "Maharaja Partap Singh's time," he added, laying stress on the name of Pratap Singh. I was a *Jareeb Kash*, one who carries the link chain for measuring land with him. I was twenty-five then. Now calculate for yourself. Lawrence Sahab had kept the names, age and village name of every worker in his '*Bahikhaata* (Ledger). That is how I remember." We started calculating on paper as he watched us with a mischievous smile on his face.

Sir Walter Lawrence had joined Maharaja Pratap Singh's Service in 1889 and started Land Settlement in 1890. It was 1974 today. After calculating, he seemed to be correct. He claimed that he had grown a new set of teeth and wailed that *Allah- Taala* could have sent a better set of teeth. since the ones Allah had sent lacked the strength of his old set of teeth.

This old man had, even at that age, a remarkable sense of humour and a very strong memory. He gave us the ages of all the old men sitting there. Some of them were centenarians and some were close to making a century. Amongst them was his son too. *Rehman Mir* told us to ask him his age. And when I did, he like a child shyly looked at his father and coyly said, "Ask my *Bab* (Dad). He knows it." Everybody burst into laughter. That morning, spent in talking and recording these God's pure and simple people, was highly rewarding and in many ways enlightening. The men we had met in *Tilel* and now in *Matchal* must have been the real human race, living as one with nature, healthy and robust and the race towards modernization had turned them into us, the urbanites living in cities and towns.

The next day, the pony contractor came with a weak pack of ponies and lamented that he had been let down by a relative who was supposed to have arranged some good horses from the nearby

village "You don't know with what difficulty I arranged these horses." As we were ready to move to our next destination, we had no other option but to accept what he was saying. "Alright, harness them! Where are their saddles?" we asked. He rushed to the grove of trees behind the forest hut and came back with a load of sacks and without a word started harnessing the ponies. We were shocked to see that these beasts which he called horses were in fact pack-ponies with a single jute rope to be used as reins and the open ends of sacks to be used as stirrups. While harnessing the ponies he stopped and rushed back to the trees and came back with a hard wooden saddle. "After searching in all the villages around I have been able to procure only this saddle. This is for Bara Sahib (pointing to Mr. Maini)." Maini Saheb was raging with anger and refused to use the saddle and somehow seated himself on the nearest pack pony and said, "Come on. Let us move now. We are getting late."

The journey to *Ring Paen*, which our porters still insisted on calling *Ringpen* was more hazardous than we had expected. I had a brush with death when my pony abruptly slipped while going downhill. The bridle path was through a thick forest. I was trying to balance myself on the wooden frame which balances the heavy loads that ponies carry, dangling on both sides. This was supposed to be our saddle. When I settled a little, the horse abruptly skidded and almost doubled up. I went into a somersault over the pony's head and fell heavily on the ground. The others, who were following, wailed in horror. But the intelligent horse did not move till I managed to get up. If he would have struggled to get up I would have been trampled under his hooves. When I got up I found that my clothes had been soiled. When the earth in the forest is thickly covered by grass and leaves, it is difficult to find where it is dry and where slushy underneath. That is what had actually happened. When I started walking upright the party heaved a sigh of relief. The pony turned its head towards me. I thought he was feeling guilty. I patted him and did not venture to ride immediately and decided to walk leaving the horse to follow. Other members

of the unit too alighted and followed. We kept walking till we reached the waters of the *Neelam Nadi* rushing to meet the *Kishen Ganga* at *Gurez*.

After having some snacks, the porters helped us alight from the ponies. The water was shallow a little distance away and it was safe to cross the river from there on horseback. There was a bridge made by laying two long logs almost tree-size, side by side that connected the two banks. The porters crossed over it carrying our boxes and equipment and waited for the horses to cross.

The path along the river to *Ring Paeen* was smooth and we reached when almost dusk. The officer in charge of the Border Security Force there had made arrangements for our stay in their bunkers which were as comfortable as possible, keeping in view the wilderness and close proximity to the Line of Actual Control.

The village *Ring* is spread over two levels. The lower level is called *Ring Paeen* meaning Lower Ring and the other, *Ring Bala* meaning Upper Ring. Our destination was in fact *Ring Bala*. So, after spending the night in the bunkers in *Ring Paeen* we started going up the hill on our ponies immediately after a breakfast of onion '*parathas*' and tea. It was really an uphill task for the ponies and they started panting heavily. We decided to scale the height on foot. Thanks to the jawans who had been deputed by the base camp to guide us to take us by a shortcut which, appearing to be tedious was really short because it took us only an hour and a half to reach *Ring Bala*.

The security establishment there was spread over a large area amongst the shady conifer trees. We were escorted to, once again a bunker, but this was a bigger one looking like a thatched hut with five cots laid out for us. As we entered, Moti Lal, our engineer, cautioned us, "Beware of the worms crawling on the ground." When we looked down the floor was covered with a layer of crawling worms. The jawans assured us that they were harmless and were spread all around in the forest. "You need not worry, they can't reach the cots. You shall keep your luggage on those benches there in the corner. These worms vanish as soon as the sun sets, to

reappear at sunrise." This assurance did not make us comfortable. But what could we do? We had to live with them as our jawans were doing.

In the morning, we were taken to the edge of the ridge from where, we had a bird's eye view of the *Neelam Valley*. A valley as beautiful as the area on our side a mountain ridge after another. It was because of the range after range of mountains that foolproof vigilance was difficult. While seeing these mountains around our valley and the surrounding valleys I kept thinking that if these were ironed as a creased cloth our geographical area would cover almost right up to half of India. We were told that these gullies, in between these mountains, were the routes through which infiltration was taking place. One can have a feel of the tremendous difficulties our security forces have to face and live in the minute to minute-tension, always at risk of losing their life, is only when one visits these areas. Civilian population in this area lives quite a distance away in scattered clusters of huts. The headman of the area had brought some villagers with him. While talking and recording them I found that it was the same story here too. The life line for the people there too was the care and help that the security personnel rendered to them. Very many officers and jawans would become part of their day to day life as long as they were posted there. And when posted to other places, partings were very sad and depressing, till the new contingent would arrive and keep the goodwill continuing.

We stayed in *Ring Bala* for two days and three nights. The first one was horrible. None of us could sleep because of the imaginary feeling of the worms crawling up all over our bodies. But during the second night we slept like logs because we were exhausted. And during the third for us worms, which were still there, had become nonexistent for us.

Misled by the advice of the headman of the area, our return journey turned into a fiasco. He advised to take the *Urri Gali* route which was the shortest. From *Ring Bala*, *Urri Gali* was very close and could be easily crossed before sunset. If we did, we would not

be caught in the forceful hurricane which lifted the rubble after that time that hit all around, injuring travellers, sometimes even fatally. That was why this pass is called *Urta Gali* (*Pass of flying rubble*). The temptation of reaching *Kala Roos* in half the normal time made us decide to take that route.

We left very early in the morning to give this route a try. The journey towards *Urta Gali* was through a very beautiful meadow followed by a small jungle after which the mountain hike started. We were happy that we had listened to the headman's advice and taken this route. But the horror of this journey started getting visible when we reached the foot of *Urta Gali*. The pass up there almost touched the sky. When we looked at it and then turned to the flanks of the mountain around, it was an ocean of rubble and cobbled stones. A frightful doubt arose in our mind. "One can't trust the weather of the hills. If the wind changes its time-schedule, and instead of 4 o'clock it started earlier, what then?" But there was no way out. So we decided to trudge along.

The ponies somehow managed to make their way through the loose stones for an ascent of a couple of hundred yards. The ascent after that became horribly taxing for them. A little slip would mean a disaster for them as well as for the riders. So we decided to alight from the horses and scale the distance on foot. It was a steep height making it so difficult for us. We kept looking at our watches as if we had to win a race. Thank God we made it to the top much before the fateful hour of 4 o'clock. The other side was rather comfortable to travel, and by that afternoon, we were in *Kala Roos*. The next day we were in Srinagar, editing what we had recorded and making it ready for broadcast. After a week's rest in Srinagar, we packed our bags again and started on another journey.



LIPA VALLEY.

Our next journey was over the northern borders to the famous *Lipa valley* via *Nowgam*. This journey gave me the opportunity to visit one of my devoted fan's apple orchard in *Nowgam*, now nicknamed *Chota London*, because of the prosperity of the erstwhile landless peasants, who became owners of the land they earlier tilled. This was due to the blessing of the revolutionary land reforms, passed by the peoples' government in the state immediately after independence. But it was a shocking experience to see how those very landless peasants, who got land without any compensation, were now behaving like the old ruthless landlords, as described earlier in this book.

The stay at my fan's orchard and later on at the lunch organised by the Brigade Commander at *Nowgam* delayed our onward journey to *Lipa Valley* which we had to undertake on army mules.

Darkness engulfed the route down the mountain to *Lipa* which was frightening, because of the cover of the dense forest through which we had to travel. We were travelling in an unknown land and to an unknown destination and that too in utter darkness. The danger of falling into a crevice to fathomless depths was lurking in our minds. But the porters, carrying our luggage, assured us that we were safe as we were travelling on mules for mules were steadier of foot than horses. Besides, they were well acquainted with the route. We were told that once used to a route, a mule could reach a destination on its own, even without an escort. Thus assured of our safety, we relaxed and were comfortable on the broad back of this noble beast of burden. His trot was not bumpy and quite comfortable too.

As the mules were winding their way down the mountain we heard gunshots reverberate in the jungle below. The mules stopped abruptly. We could see streaks of bullet fire flying from one flank of the mountain to another. We did not know what was happening. Even the porters, used to travelling in this area, shrunk to a side and sat with their breath abated. After some time the firing stopped, after which, the mules started trotting forward on their own. It seemed as if they were conscious of what was happening around.

After another half an hour the mules changed their course and kept on moving into the denser area of the forest. We again got worried because this was an intriguing move. But the porters assured us that the mules knew where we had to go. And they really did. Because, after some time they stopped just at the door of a bungalow type of a hut amidst a cluster of huge pines, the exterior of which had been covered with the bark of the pines. A light was flickering coming from within the hut. As we dismounted, a couple of officers came out to greet us as they had received the signal from the Brigade Head Quarters at *Nowgam* about our visit. Dinner was laid out and after a quick wash we too joined. We were keen on knowing something about the cross fire that we had seen a couple of hours before. The CO, a Lt. Col. brushed it aside and said that this was a common occurrence. Both sides wanted to keep their men on alert and this was one of the ways to do that. "Don't worry, you are safe here. Besides, aren't we here to protect you?" Thus relaxed, we started eating. It was very cold outside and the sizzling hot vegetarian meal was a real treat. The stewed big cauliflower in white sauce was a delicacy. Baby potato and green beans served with steamed rice was a really filling meal. When we asked them how those vegetables remained so fresh and tasty after having been transported from *Nowgam* and stored there he replied, "All these vegetables have been cultivated by our jawans here. You haven't seen the meadow of Lipa that is under our control, yet. Any way you will see it tomorrow and find out how we have developed a regular vegetable farm there. That is why we do not feel the necessity of transporting them from *Nowgam* or from Srinagar,"

informed the Commanding Officer..

As we had a hectic schedule ahead, we called it a day, finishing our dinner. While moving to the lounge where our beds had been laid out for us, we were fascinated by the interior decor of this big hut. Stumps of trees hewn and their tops polished were used as bar stools. A curved log horizontally sawed with legs fixed was the bar counter. The walls, the flooring, the beds, benches, lamp stands, in fact every piece of furniture was a specimen of artistic innovation. This hut and the other huts around too could be called products of the forest.

The next day dawned with a bright sun. And when, after breakfast, we walked to a ridge, some distance from the huts, hidden in the forest and looked down to have a look to see, what was there, a breathtaking beautiful valley unfolded before us. A thin layer of morning mist, broken here and there spread over it, made it look like a dreamland. The young captain, who was assigned the duty of taking us round, pointed to the ridge of the mountain on the other end of the valley. Handing over his binoculars to Mr. Maini, he began to acquaint us with different features of the surroundings. "Do you see that ridge and the white patches within the trees there, halfway down the ridge? That is one of the Pakistani pickets. Beyond that is the area of so called Azad Kashmir. In fact after the '71 war and the demarcation of the LOC following it, the Pakistani army, breaking rules and terms laid down in the Shimla Agreement, stealthily forced itself into the valley below and occupied the area you are seeing down there. Every other front either in the West or the East was silent and at peace. But war once again broke out here. It was the valour and sacrifice of our men because of which the Pakistani Army was defeated and this area was cleared of intruders. When we go down you will see the exact area of that operation. Many of our jawans gave their lives to defeat the Pakistanis. A memorial has been built there in the valley to pay homage to their martyrdom."

After having had a bird's eye view of the valley we walked down the slope. There were a few spots from where we could see

the distant *Muzzafarabad* area through the gaps in the range of those mountains. The birds' flight was so short that we could see the movement of the traffic on its roads with our naked eyes. Once in the valley we were lost for some time in the ethereal beauty around. Though it was the beginning of September the grass around was still lush green and the scene reminded me of one of the British highlands with healthy robust horses freely grazing in the meadow. There must have been nearly fifty of them here. First we thought that they too might belong to the army. But when the Captain, our escort, told us that these were the ponies we see in *Tangmarg* which were used by the tourists to carry them to *Gulmarg*. "You should see how weak and measly they were when brought here. And see them now. This grass here fills every muscle and every sinew of theirs. We need them for shifting our rations, our equipment and other goods around as there isn't any other mode of transport available here. We look after their owners and the contractors too. So they are happy to come here."

I was reminded of what our friend the well known Urdu writer Thakur Poonchi remarked once about a large number of retired professors and officers from other parts of the country being re-appointed and inducted in Kashmir on a large scale. "*Kashmir to Bharat ke bhoore ghodon ki charahgah hai. Woh yahan ka chara kha ke tar-o-taza aur mote hokar wapap laut jaatey hain. Bilkul usi tarah, jis tarah hum wahan Poonch me bhoore aur bekar ghoron ko akhri din guzarne ke liye junglon main chhod aate hain Lekin woh wahan ki taza ghas kha kha kar taza dum ho kar khud hi ghar wapap puhunch jate hain.*" (Kashmir is a meadow where old horses from different parts of the country are brought to graze freely. And once well fed, they return rejuvenated.)

Leaving the horses grazing there we crossed the running waters of the beautiful stream that flowed through this beautiful valley and walked to the Dargah of the patron saint of Lipa and paid our respects at his *mazar*. This *Dargah*, like all those which are situated in the border areas are very well preserved and looked after by the jawans who get posted there. Regiments may change but this duty

continues. It is true of other religious places too. From the *Dargah* we went to the memorial raised in memory of those valiant soldiers who had laid down their lives to win this land way back in 1971.

From there, we were taken to the vegetable farm about which we had been told at the dining table the previous night. We had thought that it would be a sort of a kitchen garden. But it turned out to be a regular farm, spread over a huge area of nearly a couple of acres. It had been developed on the lines of the Field Research Farm in Ladakh. I am sure such efforts of being self sufficient in growing their own vegetables by the army, must have been started by other units too in the Eastern sectors. We were surprised that the CO. of the company too was himself working along with the jawans in the field. There were almost all varieties of vegetables ready for harvesting there. We were delighted to see the size of turnips and Kashmiri round radishes.

After spending some time there and having a few platefuls of fresh salad, we were taken to the nearest Pakistani posts. Our escort, the young jovial captain told us that only two persons could go with him to the last line. So it was decided that the recording engineer and I should accompany him while the rest of the party would be made comfortable in one of the tents pitched there. After walking about half a furlong we were told that we have to enter a trench which was extremely narrow and as such we had to be very cautious. We entered the trench which had been burrowed like a rat hole right up to the end of our territory with a few small openings overhead for light and ventilation. After walking with great caution for some time, I noticed a horizontal patch of light entering the tunnel. That in fact, was the other end of this burrow.

When we reached it I found it to be an observation type of a window through which we could easily see what was happening on the Pakistani side. I instructed my engineer to keep recording whatever we talked or heard. We peeped through this gap while the Captain in whispers started giving us a brief on the situation there. "You see from this point right up to that point where the guard belonging to the *Pakistan Rangers* is standing is 'no-man's

land'. It must be about hundred metres. Look! Another Pakistani Ranger has come out of the hut." "They can easily walk up to this point. They could easily do it" I remarked. "They could, but this whole stretch on both sides is a field of deadly landmines." He asked me whether we were recording. And when I said that we were, he raised his voice and asked the Ranger through the opening looking at our side, "Hey jawan! just call your officer! I want to talk to him!" The Ranger replied rudely, "There is no officer here, talk to me! What do you want?" "Why did you open fire yesterday in the evening and continued for quite some time?" "We did not start it. You opened fire first and we had to retaliate. There was a deer around here and we wanted to hunt him down. But he ran in to your territory. That was a shot aimed at him. And look at you, you started firing indiscriminately at us." Okay, might have been as you say. Now tell me did you hunt him down?" "Didn't I say, that bastard had vanished into your territory. But I am sure he will come back. We had seen his mate too in our area sometime ago." "Shall pray that he does. And if he does and you are able to hunt him down, promise you'll throw a leg of his over to us too." "And if you do find him *halal* it and throw a portion to us." The captain said that he sure would. And turned to us with a glint of mischief in his eyes and said, "Such an exchange of communication is not uncommon here. Now let us make a move. It is not desirable to stay here for long." So we moved back and joined the rest of our group.

The sun was about to set, so we hurried to reach the mess before it was night. The next day we recorded some interviews with the civilians from the nearby villages besides some of the jawans and the pony owners from *Tangamarg* and left for *Nowgam*. Thankfully, we rode, not on mules, but on horses as the mules had been sent on some other assignment from there.

The recorded conversation we had completed in the burrowed tunnel, when broadcast on the National Network got a good response and made listeners aware of how the two armies were so close to each other looking eyeball to eyeball in many areas of

conflict. At the same time, they were behaving like neighbours when there was peace, even ready to share some goodies and sweets on some festivals; normal human beings after all, craving peace. That was the last we had planned to cover in that series of documentaries.



BROADCASTS FOR RURAL AUDIENCES, WOMENS AND CHILDREN

Though our general service was meant for every class of listeners, another aspect of our broadcasting was to broadcast separate programmes for specific segments of society in which day-to-day problems would be highlighted. The major section of the population comprised people living in villages. The daily programme, *Gaemi Bayen Hendi Khaetra* (programme for the people living in villages) was introduced from the very inception of Radio Kashmir Srinagar. It was the presentation and talent of its stock characters, Niza Saeb, (Peer Nizamudin); Kanthajoo, (Pushkar Bhan); that laid a strong foundation of this programme. Some other talented people like Mohammad Abdullah, Mohammad Sultan Pundit, Jagger Nath Saqi, Sharifudin, and Abdul Rehman Bhat also carried the legacy forward. The utility of this programme was immense since it educated farmers in revolutionary agricultural techniques taking place the world over.

In this daily programme, experts of every aspect of agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry would be invited to interact with the stock characters and anchors of the programme. It was the presentation of the above artists and the planning and production of Pushkar Bhan the Head of the Section that this programme had become popular with urban listeners too. In addition to their efforts it was the Farm and Home Officer Shibhan Kishen Bhan, an expert on agriculture, who gave professional touches to the programmes. I had developed a special affection for all the staff artists working in this section because they were always ready to participate in my productions. It was a family feeling with them. I miss those friends

who have left us. They were genuine human beings. I wonder if such persons could be replaced. Some of them, by God's grace, are still there and in touch with me.

Other programmes that had become part of every Kashmiri's life were the educational programmes under Pragash. The credit of their success goes to Mohan Nirash, and Shri Parimoo who would write and present this very informative programme. This was a valuable store house of knowledge about the history of our ancient past and culture. I hope that the scripts of this programmer which I had got preserved for our script's library are still there.



PROGRAMME FOR WOMEN

Though there were quite a few programmes for the education of women living in the villages as part of the daily programme there was need for a programme for women living in the city and towns where girls' education was fast-spreading. Therefore, programmes for their benefit had to be planned, keeping in view their problems and interests. So, a weekly programme was started and a socially aware short story writer Taj Begum Renzoo was motivated to join as the main anchor and conductor of the programme. After some time, Maryam Begum, who later on became the star attraction in the daily programme in Zoonadab too joined. In fact she was Taj Begum Renzoo's find. Later on, another educated woman with an emancipated mind, Uma Wazir joined the programme. It was because of the joint efforts of these three artists that the programme catered to not only home-makers but also to the younger generation of women in general. Many emancipated and highly educated ladies like Quratulain, Hawa Bashir Shamla Mufti would enrich this programme though they would contribute to other programmes too.



NEWS BROADCASTS AND CURRENT PROGRAMMES

As there were only a couple of daily newspapers in Srinagar at a time when broadcasting was started in Kashmir and those too were in Urdu, which could not cater to a majority of the population especially in the villages, Radio Kashmir came as a redeemer not only in imparting news but also disseminating other information. It started news bulletins not only in Urdu and Kashmiri but also in different regional languages of the state like Dogri, Pothohari, Gojri, Pahadi, Balti, and Punjabi, languages completely ignored so far. Besides, the need of the hour was to start a Pushtu service too. For this tremendous task we had to have a systematic news unit with news editors, sub editors, translators, copyists, monitors and news readers. As we used to broadcast in Dogri and Ladakhi too in the beginning, the news unit too was always busy and preoccupied. Till 1954, this section was headed by the Director, News. The first Director, News, was Gwashi Lal Kaul, who used to suffix B.A. to his name and would proudly say that he was an old graduate of the University of Punjab when the principal of his college (S. P. College) was a British professor from England, one Mr. McDermott.

Before joining Radio Kashmir, Gwashi Lal Kaul edited a weekly in English. As there were very few professional journalists available, he was picked to hold the fort. As Mahinder Kaul and I were the earliest news readers I had the occasion of working with him for some time. We alone did not read the news. As we had six news bulletins in a day, Hafizudin Baihaqi, Abdul Haq Burq, and Bashir Butt too would share the burden.

In the news unit I was introduced to Syed Ghulam Rasool Qadri,

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a remarkable person who was more of an artist than a copyist-translator. I always felt that he had not got his proper line of work. Our common interest was literature, especially in Urdu poetry and fiction which brought us very close and we became lifelong friends. Bashir Butt was already his admirer. We were joined by Ali Mohammad Lone too. After some time a well-read and talented Abdul Rashid Bandey (Naqshbandi) with a baritone that could be the envy of any outstanding newsreader, was inducted. As he also belonged to an area close to where Ghulam Rasool Qadri resided, he too got attached to him. Qadri, as we fondly called him, had a subtle sense of humour and would apply it to Gwasha Lal Kaul, B.A. too. It was because of Qadri's dignified poise that even Gwasha Lalji was more often than not, amused by his banter.

Gwasha Lal had developed a strange equation with Qadri. They would start discussions sometimes on mundane topics. The State Directorate General, Information & Broadcasting, appointed a law graduate as a Kashmiri newsreader. This news was given to Gwasha Lal, by Qadri before anybody else. "Sir, this man is M.A. L.L.B. a very high degree Sir. Master's with Law! It may be a big problem for you Sir." "Is he educated?" "He is an M.A. LLB Sir!" "Don't you understand what I ask you?" Qadri repeated his answer. Thus an argument started. Work got suspended. We were waiting for the bulletin. We understood what Gwasha Lal meant and were sure that Qadri too must have understood what his boss had meant. But he was amusing himself in teasing him and we all around them, were also enjoying the fun. The newsreader Kashi Nath Vakil who was a law graduate did not stay for long as he was later selected as a court inspector and thus resigned and left Radio Kashmir. But the fun that his appointment had created continued to tickle us even after that.

It was sad that Gwasha Lal Kaul did not get a good deal at the time when Radio Kashmir was taken over by the Centre in 1954. A Director of News was equated to the post of a Transmission Assistant much lower in the hierarchy and Ghulam Rasool Qadri was promoted to the post of a librarian and as such he got closer to us.

After becoming part of All India Radio, the first in-charge of the News unit appointed, was Janki Nath Ganhar, who held a Master's Degree in English with a Gold Medal from Lucknow University. He was a competent journalist and scholar who did a lot of research on the history of Buddhism in Kashmir and Ladakh and published a valuable book on the subject. A very dignified and noble soul, he gave the News Unit a professional buildup.

After he got promoted and moved to the Publicity & Information service of Government of India, Habibullah Allaqaband became in-charge of the News Unit. He was an able and dedicated member of the State Information Department. He served the organisation till his retirement.

After the introduction of the Indian Information Service the post was designated as Editor, News and Pushkar Nath Kaul held the post till I was with All India Radio. Besides news editors, senior correspondents were deputed to the News Service to collect news and interviews for the Central News Services Division in Delhi and were also posted there from time to time. While writing about this important cadre the name of Jaggar Nath Dhar comes immediately to mind. A fearless journalist, he had a subtle sense of humour, He is still professionally active being the Chief Editor of the popular magazine 'Koshur Samachar' published from Delhi.

Whosoever may collect and edit the news bulletin, it is the newsreader who is the person who delivers it to listeners. It is his or her voice quality, style of delivery, pronunciation, diction and poise that make the broadcast effective and at the same time make them popular with the listeners. Radio Kashmir had a long chain of newsreaders. Besides Mahinder Kaul, we had a lovable Kashmiri newsreader Pushkar Nath Handoo besides Hafiz-u-Din Baihaqi the first Kashmiri News reader. It was however tragic that death cut Handoo's tenure short. He had finished his broadcast and had left for home when he got fatally hit by the collapse of a big stone wall at the entry gate of the Polo Ground. It was a great loss to the organisation and a bigger tragedy for his family. The Department was however very kind to absorb his younger brother on compassionate grounds in the organisation.

The newsreaders emerging later on were led by the versatile Abdul Rashid Bandey. Well conversant with both Urdu and Kashmiri he evolved his own style of delivery. He not only read the news but also participated in other programmes. He later on had the honour of reading the news in Urdu from All India Radio Delhi too. Another newsreader was rather a god-sent, Tahira Hasan, whose husband was employed as the Principal of the Regional Engineering College, Srinagar. She was from Lucknow and her mother-tongue being Urdu, her diction and delivery of the written word had a sophistication of its own and she soon became quite popular with our listeners. Then there was Motilal Khazanchi. He was a good singer too and had a soft voice in comparison to Abdul Rashid's baritone. His sudden death too was a big loss. He had read his midday news bulletin and had left for his home for lunch. But on reaching home in Baal Garden suffered a massive heart attack and breathed his last even before he could be taken to hospital. The well known painter Kishori Kaul too read the news in Urdu before she got a scholarship and went for studies to Baroda Art College. In between, another outstanding contribution was made by Farooq Nazki. A great son of a great father, Farooq would participate in our Children's Programme. It was his command over the Urdu language and the inherited poetic genius of his father, that he became an asset to broadcasting as a whole. By sheer dint of his caliber he rendered valuable service to the country during the most trying times of Kashmir when he held the fort first in Radio Kashmir Srinagar and later on in Doordarshan too.

From amongst the Kashmiri news readers Prem Nath Herman was on top of the list. He too passed away while in service. The vacuum had been filled by another talented news reader Makhan Lal Bekas, a renowned poet and litterateur. Most of the Kashmiri newsreaders used to translate the news themselves from the main bulletin that was in Urdu. Another poet Abdul Ahad Farhad joined the group of Kashmiri newsreaders along with Syed Muzaffar Kashani. As the number of daily news bulletins increased, there was a big panel of casual news readers too. I pay homage to all of

them who were always ready to participate in any other programme especially in dramas and other feature programmes. They even contributed scripts for quite a few programmes. It was not only the responsibility of the news unit to prepare news bulletins in Urdu and Kashmiri but to edit the master bulletins that catered to our Gojri and Pahari listeners. That is how this unit too became an important pillar of the edifice called Radio Kashmir. It was not only news but also commentaries and assessments on them that helped listeners to obtain the correct perspective of all the major events. The Haalati Hazria Par Tabsira, a weekly programme was started by Sadr-u-Din-Mujahid and Nandlal Watal. But after Mujaid Sahil's joining Sheikh Sohail in jail G.H.Aijaz shared this responsibility. Later on such news reviews were broadcast by eminent journalists like Shameem Ahmed, Shameen Mohammad, Sayed Mallik and writers like Mohammad Yusuf Taing and many others.



This chapter about News & Newsreaders shall be incomplete without mentioning our illustrious poet, author and media personality Ghulam Nabi Khayal, who had joined as a news reader after passing through a proper audition. He had gained immediate popularity with the listeners. But he too suffered because of the same "crime" that had got Ali Mohammad Lone and I transferred from Srinagar. As he was still working on casual basis he was given a more severe punishment. He had been straight away sent to the Central Jail and lost his job. But after his release he continued to contribute to broadcasting not as a news reader but as a prominent talker, writer and essayist.

(Note: The above paragraph had been missed at the printing stage for which we beg readers apologies. Details of working of departments other than Music and Drama will be in the second volume)

TALKS AND THE SPOKEN WORD

There were two separate sections for talks: one was for Kashmiri and the second for Urdu. The first producer for Kashmiri was Ali Mohammad Lone. Being an established writer in both Kashmiri and Urdu, he laid a sound foundation and established the fact that the Kashmiri language had great potential in prose writing. Though poetry dominated the scene, due to the Cultural Renaissance post-1947 Kashmir, a couple of magazines in Kashmiri had started getting published. Many writers, who wrote in Urdu switched to Kashmiri. So Ali Mohammad Lone attracted them to come and contribute to our talks' section. There was hardly any aspect of society that was not covered in our talks. After he moved over to the Cultural Academy, another doyen of Kashmiri literature Autar Krishan Rehbar became the Producer of Kashmiri Spoken word. His contribution not only to Kashmiri prose but also to the promotion of poetry, both traditional and modern is highly commendable. Besides that, he was always in search of young writers and poets and would take great pleasure in guiding them. His contribution to radio and stage drama too was solid. The Radio Magazine in Kashmiri planned and presented by him was eagerly awaited by the literary circle of our Kashmiri listeners. A research scholar, his 'History of Kashmiri Literature' is a very valuable contribution to the Kashmiri language. It was he who started the programme of reading to listeners some important novels written in Kashmiri, chapter by chapter, in a series of broadcasts.

The Urdu Talks Section was in the charge of Kamal Ahmed Siddiqui, a well known Urdu poet who was made a producer along

with Ali Mohammad Lone, Pushkar Bhan and me. Being in contact with Urdu writers of the country, Kamal Siddiqui organised quite a few memorable mushairas in Srinagar. He proficiently edited and presented the Radio Magazine in Urdu to which not only established Urdu writers contributed, but also allotted space to budding poets and prose writers.

Scholars, poets, and intellectuals who were well conversant with both the above languages would come forward to broadcast talks and discourses on varied subjects and problems connected with day to day events of the fast changing world and its effect on the life of the common man. Scholars like Dr. Agha Ashraf, Mir Ghulam Rasool Nazki, Dina Nath Nadim, Prof. Rehman Rahi, Mohammad Yusuf Taing, Amin Kamil, Dr. Amar Malmohi, Ghulam Nabi Gauhar, Ghulam Nabi Firaq, Prithvi Nath Pushp, Prof. Mohammad Amin Anderabi, Shamim Ahmed Shamim, Mohammad Sayeed Malik, Nusrat Anderabi, Shahid Badgami, Rattan Lal Shant, Nishant Ansari and a host of talented writers of younger generation wrote and broadcast volumes and volumes of valuable prose in both the languages and enriched our spoken word programmes.

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ANNOUNCERS & PRESENTERS

Announcers are the link between programmes presented and their listeners. They are the promoters of the programmes that have been produced by different producers. They, through curtain raisers, inform and motivate the listeners about the programmes that are going to be broadcast. They were in the beginning not allowed to announce their own names with the programmes they presented. But when a cadre of presentation announcers was created, they too were allowed to announce their names along they presented and get due credit, creating a fan following of their own.

The earliest announcer was Shambhu Sharma from Jammu who was joined by Santosh Kohli and Amina Shirin. They were Urdu speaking and as such would make the announcements in Urdu for Kashmiri programmes too. This sounded rather odd. So a search began to find a suitable voice fluent in Kashmiri as well as Urdu. That was how Shanta Kaul was motivated to join. As such, she was the first Kashmiri woman broadcaster who became a household name later on. Meanwhile, Jalal Geelani too had been appointed. The other popular announcers who made our programmes saleable were Mohammad Amin, Noor Mohammad Lone, Surja Sahib, Nikki Aapa of *Vadi Ki Awaz*, Uma Khosla, Nayeema Ahmed, Siraj Mirani, Girija Watal, Opendra Khashu, Abdul Hamid Khan, Abdul Rehman Khan etc.

I will be failing in my duty if I do not mention the Western music programmes that we had started around 1950. The first presenter of this programme was Col. Dicky, a retired officer of the British Army, who had settled in Srinagar. A lively old widower,

Col. Dicky lived a lonely life after the death of his wife, in a houseboat near the bund on the river Jhelum. He was so involved in the presentation of this programme of 30 minutes that he would get his own discs as we did not get the records (playing discs) in Kashmir those days. The payment to a casual announcer those days was INR 5/-. When Col Dicky would receive the payment, he would raise the five rupee note high in his hand and with a proud smile say, "See! Still earning!" He loved the Dal and finally drowned himself in it. We all grieved his death. Sometime after his death, the charge of Western music was taken over by Asha Henley. A deserted Kashmiri baby from Hari Parbat, adopted, brought up and educated by a British woman in the U.K. Asha Hanley had come to Kashmir with her husband Mr. Hanley, who was commissioned by the state government for some research work. Asha Hanley was a trained broadcaster and added professionalism to the programme. She left after a few years when her husband's assignment was over. After her, announcers from our own younger generation started getting groomed in presenting the programme. They were led by Zia Durrani, followed by Uma Khosla, Situ Nanda, Shahzadi Simon, Vijay Mattu, Jyoti Raina and others. In fact Uma Khosla, as a member of the staff, became in-charge and remained at that position up to her retirement.

At my age of 92, memory normally weakens but in my case, it gets sharper when I recollect my days in broadcasting. While winding up this segment I am suddenly reminded of the members of the Gojri programme, which I supervised for some time, especially its producer H. A. Zia, who later retired as the Station Director and the lovable A.K. Sohrab, A.H. Kasana and Altaf Bukhari.



SOME MEMORABLE EVENTS AND HAPPENINGS

THE FIRST ALL INDIA MUSHAIRA HELD IN SRINAGAR AFTER INDEPENDENCE

The first important event after I joined Radio Kashmir Srinagar was the celebration by the first ever Peoples' Government in Jammu & Kashmir after its election to the J&K Constituent Assembly. It was followed by the General Council Meeting of the National Conference which had come to power unopposed. In addition to other celebrations, an All India *Mushaira* was organized to which prominent poets of the country had been invited to participate, besides some important poets of the state. The most outstanding Urdu poets whose names I still remember included Josh Malihabadi, Jigar Muradabadi, Josh Malsiani, Saghar Nizami, Nashoor Wahidi, Harichand Akhter, Tilok Chand Mehroom, Aarizoo Dehlvi, Mir Ghulam Rasool Nazki, Shahzore Kashmiri, Qaiser Qalander and many other veterans of the time. This historical *Mushaira* had to be presided over by none other than the Prime Minister of India, Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru. It had been decided that the entire *Mushaira* should be broadcast live from Radio Kashmir. So we were getting all geared up to face the challenge many days ahead of the event.

The venue nearest to the studios of Radio Kashmir Srinagar in Polo Ground, that would facilitate the live coverage flawlessly, was the open space fringed by *chinars* adjacent to the Residency Garden, which, after this event was developed as *Sher-i-Kashmir* Park. This was just a big stretch of vacant land with only a solitary old house in which Radio Kashmir Srinagar had started a canteen

for the staff. So a *pandal* with a big stage had to be built for the event and that too at very short notice. It was for the first time that we witnessed the superb organizing capacity of Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad who had been sworn in as the Deputy Prime Minister of the State. It was he who had selected the venue and marked the place where the stage should be built. We, with our engineers, were there to see where and how our O.B. (Outside Broadcast) point would be fixed.

Truck after truck, loaded with *deodar*-sleepers, which were at that time used for laying railway tracks, arrived and were unloaded near the canteen building. There was a big contingent of labourers lazily piling them up. After a little while, when they saw Bakhshi Sahib's car coming they leapt in to action. Bakhshi Sahib ordered them to stop and lost his temper on the engineer standing there to supervise and asked him why he had not started laying the sleepers in the area marked by him. The engineer tried to offer some lame excuse. Bakhshi Sahib ignored him and took a few labourers with him, where the marking for the stage had been made and showed them how the sleepers had to be laid out on the ground and how layer after layer of sleepers was to be piled up to the desired height. Bakhshi Sahib's instructions moved as if a magic wand over the labourers and in no time the stage started taking shape.

A couple of labourers were preparing salt-tea near the canteen for the rest of the labourers. When more than half of the stage had been erected, Bakhshi Sahib asked the labourers to take some rest and have tea. He himself also sat with them and shared a cup of their salt tea and a '*tchochivor*' (Kashmiri baked bread) with them. Every one quickly drank the tea and rushed back to finish the job. Imagine the Deputy Prime Minister of the state sitting on the ground with the labourers. That was Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad. It was a sight to see how carpets from the *tosha khana* arrived and the stage was decorated at electric speed. By that time our engineers too had laid out the lines to the studios across the road and an O. B. point had been established.

On the day of the *mushaira* seating arrangements had been made

in the ground, we too were excited. A few rows of sofas and chairs were placed a few feet away from the stage for Sher-i-Kashmir Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, the State Prime Minister, his cabinet colleagues, the participating poets and other VIPs. rest of the ground was covered for people to sit. Even before sunset, people had started thronging into the ground. As there was no strictness of security checks then, the ground got filled in no time. Those who did not get space in the ground, occupied the roads around.

Like the organizers of the *mushaira* and the masses sitting in the ground. I had to make the opening announcement after which Arjun Dev Rashk Mirpuri, himself a poet and litterateur, had to take over and conduct the proceedings. We were sitting in a corner of the stage which was our O.B. point. The engineers were waiting for the green signal. Sheikh Sahib and his cabinet colleagues had arrived and were now awaiting Punditji's arrival. And when he arrived the entire area resounded with the slogans of *Azad Hindustan Zindabad, Naya Kashmir Payenda Baad, Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru Zinda Baad, Sheri Kashmir Zinda Baad* followed by thunderous applause when the poets and Punditji graced the stage and took their seats. I made the opening announcement and then handed over the microphone to Arjun Dev Rashk. After welcoming the gathering he requested Punditji to inaugurate the *Mushaira*. As already mentioned, the proceedings were being broadcast live. Besides that, we were recording the function in our studios too on *Presto discs*, the only recording facility we then had.

As the *mushaira* progressed, poet after poet kept on vying with each other to be one up. As a lover of poetry I have never seen such a gathering of poets performing live after that. *Mushairas* have been organized even after that but none with such a galaxy of poets, which continued till the wee hours of the morning.

Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru who was presiding over the *mushaira* left after an hour or so. But Sheikh Sahib and others returned to their seats after seeing Punditji off amidst the favourite slogan of that time *Azaad Hindustan Zinda Baad Naya Kashmir Payenda*

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Baad. The huge audience again got glued to the ground after Punditji left and the mushaira continued. Being the seniormost poet of that time Josh Malihabadi graced the stage when other poets had finished. He was accompanied by his nephew who was carrying his 'bayaz' (his handwritten collection of poems). When he was about to start, Sheikh Sahib sitting in the audience with Begum Abdullah and some other ladies, in a loud voice made a request, "Josh Sahib 'fil badih ho jaye' (spontaneous and on the spot) 'Fil Badih' Josh Sahib." Josh Malihabadi, who was in a good mood after having had a couple of drinks at the temporary bar organised in the Residency Quarters for the poets, replied in his thunderous voice, "Sheikh Sahib Aap Zara Pahle Mardane mein Aaiye phir Fil Badih Hojayegi." There was huge laughter around, that continued for quite a few moments. And when the laughter subsided, Josh, sitting on the *gao takhia* (the big bolster) began to *loot the mushaira* as the saying goes. He began with this on-the-spot composed 'Rubai':

*Mamnoo-e-Tarab se Lutf-e Paihum Lene
Isyan Ke Shajar Ki chaon Tale Dum Lene
Aawaz Do Kaashmir Aa Puhancha Josh
Allah Se Intiqam -i- Aadum Lene.*

(To seek unending pleasures from the forbidden desires
To relax and breathe under the shade of the tree of sin.

Declare aloud that Josh has landed in Kashmir (Heaven on Earth)

To avenge God for having banished Adam from Heaven.

You can imagine what a boisterous bout of applause he must have evoked. There were excited shouts of 'mukkarar, mukkarar' ('Encore! Once more!') from every corner of the ground. Sheikh Sahib was so excited that he stood up and applauded. After this remarkable 'rubai' Josh Malihabadi, the unchallenged king of 'rubaiyat' continued presenting *rubai* after *rubai* in his gorgeous style, his nephew feeding him with the first few words of the *rubai* to revive his master's memory, including the famous *rubai* ridiculing the traditional Sheikhs, but lauding the one and only the

one and that was Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. Digitized By eGangotri

Thus, continuing in that strain, when his nephew whispered the beginning words of the *rubai* to follow, Josh whispered back "*Mota maal do mota maal*" (feed some easy stuff for them) forgetting that the microphone was on and people were listening. There was an uneasy murmur. Somebody from the crowd shouted aloud, "*Josh Sahib hum resham ke beopari hain. Mota maal nahin chalega.*" (Josh Sahib we trade in silk, coarse material will not do.) There was loud applause. Josh commented *Subhan Allah*. He had liked the comment. After waiting a little he continued and mesmerized the audience with the finest of his *rubaiats*.

As the timing of broadcasting hours is decided by an international authority the direct broadcast had to close halfway. But the *mushaira* continued till almost dawn.



FIRE ENGULFS THE STUDIOS OF RADIO KASHMIR

The year was 1951 and the month, March. We were in our office across the road outside the Emporium Gardens when in the afternoon around three thirty, we saw a column of thick black smoke jetting out of the shingled roof of our studios in Polo Ground. We rushed to find out to what had happened. By the time we reached, flames had started spreading from one corner of the roof to the other. The engineering staff on duty was trying its best to extinguish the fire with the normal fire-fighting equipment we had. The fire had started from the store on the first floor where there was a huge stock of the highly inflammable Presto discs. As the building was old and lot of wood had been used in its construction, the fire had instantly turned into an inferno. News of this tragedy had spread by that time in the city too. Feeling that it was their own property on fire, thousands of people came running and wailing to fight it.

The police, government officials, political workers, and some ministers assembled there were running helplessly helter-skelter. But it was Bakhshi Sahib who had come into action immediately on arrival to supervise the fire-fighting operations. Fire brigade engines that had arrived by then, were trying their best to douse the fire. Flooring of the first floor was being consumed by the flames and would collapse any time. Young citizens who had gathered there were trying their best to save as much of the equipment as possible. They, at risk of their lives, managed to bring out the main turntable along with the smaller one, including the microphones, out of the blazing fire. They even brought out

the maharaja's huge carpet that was used as the flooring of the music studio, which is even now in the new building.

It was a sight to see how a young group along with the firemen was trying to break a concrete beam in the control room that was nearly two feet thick. Without it the transmitter could not be taken out. There was tension all around. The ground floor ceiling was now fully ablaze. If it would collapse the only transmitter we had would turn into a heap of junk and that would have been the end of broadcasting in Kashmir, God knows for how many months.

Everyone was watching with bated breath the brave young men breaking the beam. The cry of jubilation of the crowd still rings in my ears when they finally succeeded in breaking it and bringing the transmitter out. As they were lodging the huge transmitter on the ground, the ceiling collapsed. While paying my tribute to those young men whose names we did not know or did not care to know, I must record here that it was Bakhshi Sahib's motivation that infused vigour and courage in them to achieve such a remarkable feat.

While the fire brigades were busy in their operation, our engineers started checking the equipment that had been saved. In the meantime, a big tent with a partition in it had been brought from the *Toshakhana* and had been pitched in the Polo Ground itself. The team of engineers led by the Station Engineer Shri B. R. Kapoor established a control room in the small partition inside the tent. The transmitter had been damaged during the operation. The credit for repairing and making it work, must go to the engineers Mr. Verma and K. R. Gupta. With the help of Pushkar Nath Nehru, P. L. Khazanchi, Abdul Sattar and Mohammad Amin, they created history by setting up a studio within two hours in the bigger part of the tent, ready to operate. Cables had already been laid to connect this emergency studio to the transmitter, lodged at a little distance in the ground. This, I am sure must be an unparalleled achievement in broadcasting in the world. Our evening transmission had to start at 5.30pm and we were on air delayed by only two hours. What a remarkable feat! That was a visible demonstration of the love that people had for this institution.

FLOODS of 1952

August is a month of floods in Kashmir when the frozen snow over the *Pirpanchal* mountain range in the southern part of the valley, gets loosened because of the heat of June. Then, come July and this loosened snow melts fast because of the torrential rain that falls on it. Thus, an enormous amount of water rushes down into the valley where the source of the river *Jhelum*, *Verinag* lies. This results in the swelling of the river and its tributaries. The flow of the water is towards the north, where lie the city and the rest of the valley. This has been the root cause of floods in the valley.

In the month of August in 1952 the rains continued for days together resulting in the water level crossing the danger mark. Even the water in the *Club 'nala'* joining the *Jhelum* with Dal Lake, which is close to the polo ground and hence Radio Kashmir Srinagar, started touching the level of the bunds holding it. Bashir Butt, Ali Mohammad Lone and I were asked to check the position near the bridge over the canal. We were shocked to see that the houseboats anchored in the canal had risen almost to the level of the road. The boatmen were trying hard to tighten the ropes to steady them. Suddenly, a frightening hue and cry of a huge crowd rose from upstream *Sonawar*. We turned towards it and saw a huge wall of water nearly twenty feet high rushing towards the canal. We ran for our lives, and while running, we looked back, and saw a houseboat getting lifted with the rushing water and striking against the bridge. The pressure of water was so strong that the houseboat broke into pieces. The water that had flown over the bund was spreading with full speed into the Polo Ground.

We ran towards the studios and by the time we reached has two feet of water already touching the pavilion stairs. We came to know that a big portion of the bund had collapsed at *Ram Munshi Bagh* and the river was gushing in from there at great speed. The situation was alarming! P.S. Bhatia, the Chief Officer on Special Duty, decided to go off air and shut down the transmission.

It was an order from Sheikh Sahib's office, who was holding charge of the state's Information & Broadcasting Ministry, besides that of the Prime Minister, that essential staff should always be readily available in case of an emergency. Therefore, a row of one-storey hutments, adjacent to Residency Garden, which had been housing the working staff of the British Resident, was cleaned and painted. These blocks of two rooms and a kitchen were turned into residential quarters for the 'Broadcasters of Independent Kashmir', who were considered essential staff. So Prem Nath Pardesi, Mahinder Kaul, Mohan Lal Aima, Abdul Sattar, Som Nath Kachroo, members of the Pashtu news unit along with their families and I had to leave our homes and move into these quarters. As the level of the water was rising, we too had to quickly move to the big dormitory-type of room on the first floor of the canteen in the Sher-i-Kashmir Park.

I can never forget that night of tension. It was still raining and every hour we kept checking the water level from the balcony. Thank God, around midnight the rain stopped! The following morning was bright and the water level too had receded. So we rushed to the studios. The floods in the ground too had abated and we opened the morning transmission and started again. Meanwhile, our families too had returned to the quarters.

Stopping of broadcasts, because of the flood had become national news and All India Radio Head Quarters in Delhi too were not happy with P. S. Bhatia's decision. The contention was that broadcasting is not to stop even in war and had to hold on till the last even, if a country was about to surrender. But P. S. Bhatia had been able to convince his superiors, that the decision had been taken in consultation with the state authorities, who were handling

the situation. The level of the river was still rising but the breach had been filled and the gushing of the water stopped. The over-precautious Bhatia Sahib ordered that a boat must be somehow procured and kept ready in the ground for any untoward eventuality and for the safety of the staff on duty. In fact, our Office Superintendent Habibullah, did somehow manage to get a ferry boat on rent, which was brought in a handcart to the Polo Ground and it remained there for quite some time even after the fear of floods had receded. In fact it became a rerason of jokes on poor Haba Sahib our Office Superintendent.

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POET LAUREATE GHULAM AHMED MAHJOOR'S DEATH

It was the month of April, 1952 when the news of the sad demise of the great poet Ghulam Ahmed Mehjoor reached the News Room. When it was announced over the radio, the entire valley went into mourning. Their beloved poet was no more. He was the poet who had inspired them to throw away the shackles of slavery and raise a hurricane or bring around an earthquake to shake the very foundations of those who had subjugated them. A poet who had sung of love, of brotherhood, peace and tranquillity, who had not spared even some of the power drunk leaders, after the peoples' government was formed, through his powerful lyrics of satire. The only poet who had been made Poet Laureate by the Peoples' Government after Independence, had breathed his last in his home in village *Mitrigam* in '*tahsil Pulwama*'. Hearing this, it was decided that a team from Radio Kashmir should be sent to cover the sad event at *Mitrigam*.

I had been to *Mitrigam* along with my friends and class-fellows Qaiser Qalander and Salah-u-Din when we were in college and were members of the Indian People's Theatre Association to meet Mehjoor Sahib in 1945 to interview him about his life. The purpose was to write and stage a play on his life. This we had done on the advice of Balraj Sahni who was General Secretary of the Indian People's Theatre Association. It was Mahjoor Sahib's love for the younger generation that had made him request us to stay with him for a couple of days more than planned. Somehow, the play did not materialize. But I did use this visit as the beginning of the film *Shair-e-Kashmir Mahjoor*. So, I was keen to go to *Mitrigam* to

pay homage to that great son of Kashmir. But then, fresh news came in that he had been already buried in his ancestral graveyard there in his village. But Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad the Deputy Prime Minister and the government had decided that Mahjoor Sahib must be buried with full state honours in the same cemetery where *Habba Khatoon* had been made to rest.

Mahjoor Sahib being quite knowledgeable of the ancient history of Kashmir had identified the grave of *Habba Khatoon* at *Pantatcowkh* near *Pandrethan* overlooking the river Jhelum, her *Vyeth*, about eight kilometers from the main city of Srinagar. So a decision was taken by the government that Mahjoor Sahab's body be exhumed from the grave in *Mitrigam* and carried to Srinagar in a procession and buried by the side of the queen poetess *Habba Khatoon's* grave with full state honours. So our plan to go to *Mitrigam* was cancelled and we were instructed to rush to *Pantatchowkh* to cover that historical event from there.

This news was broadcast and by the time the procession accompanying the coffin of Mahjoor Sahib arrived, the entire area, the roads leading to the cemetery, the stone quarry behind and the river bank below got filled by thousands of people. The state band was playing funereal music with drums muffled, followed by a contingent of the National Militia walking in a slow march and guns reversed. The carriage carrying the coffin of this great son of Kashmir was slowly moving towards the path going up to the cemetery. I was standing in a corner of the graveyard, watching and noting the proceedings. The coffin with a beautiful cover spread over it and a heap of wreaths and flowers, was lifted by the pallbearers and slowly taken up to the grave led by Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad and other dignitaries amidst the entire multitude reciting *La Illah- ha- Illalah*. The grave had been dug just a few feet away from the other grave that Mahjoor had earmarked as *Habba Khatoon's* final resting place. The mortal remains of the Poet Laureate were lowered into the grave after the religious obligations were over, while the army fired gun salute and the buglers played the last post. This was perhaps for the first time in

Kashmir that the body of a dignitary had been exhumed and given a second burial. After a few days the tombstone was readied with Mahjoor Sahib's immortal couplet engraved on it:

*GUL HARDA HARAN SONTI YIYIE DUBARA KARAN
DOUR MEAR MEAR CHI PHERAN ZINDAGI WASVAS
MARNUK TRAAV.*

(Flowers whither away and fall in autumn,(but) then spring comes they again bud and bloom,

Thus life gets a fresh birth after death, so give up the fear of death.)

It is not certain whether the grave at *Pantatchowk* is actually the grave of the poetess *Habba Khatoon*. According to the team of the State Cultural Academy led by Mohammad Yusuf Taing which had gone to Biswak with Sheikh Sahib in 1976 during the Kashmir Festival in Patna, to install a tombstone at the grave of the last ruler of Kashmir, *Yusuf Shah Chak*, the caretakers there had pointed to another grave a little distance away from *Yusuf Shah's* tomb and said that that was *Hubba Bibi's* tomb. Anyway, *Habba Khatoon's* life is shrouded in mystery and I leave it at that.

I cannot however, say whether it was a wise decision to shift the mortal remains of Mahjoor Sahib from his native village to *Pantha Tchowk*, because, in spite of loud declarations and promises of different governments, his grave remained in desolation for decades. These great poets may be turning in their grave because of the horrifying noise of the unending heavy traffic on the road below.



THE FATEFUL 1953 & THE ARREST OF SHER-I-KASHMIR SHEIKH MOHAMMAD ABDULLAH.

1953 was a very tough year for Kashmir. The folly of taking the complaint of the invasion by Pakistan to grab Kashmir by force in 1947 to the United Nations' Security Council had complicated the issue instead of getting it resolved. Even Gandhiji had not approved the move. He had expressed this in one of his *Prarthana sabhas*. He had said, "*I am advising Jawaharlal not to take the issue to the Security Council. There are dishonest people sitting there.*"

We had gone there as a country that had been invaded and assaulted by Pakistan as an aggrieved party. And they cleverly made Pakistan an equal party instead of treating it as an invader. As a Kashmiri and one who had seen a dream of *Naya Kashmir* and worked to achieve it in my humble way, from my very student days, I have been grieving over two major mistakes Jawaharlal Nehru had committed. One was to agree to a ceasefire when our army had driven the enemy out of the valley and was advancing to clear the rest of the state of its occupation. Had we not agreed to a ceasefire and had let the army finish its operation, there would have been no Kashmir issue. The second mistake was to take the issue to the U.N Security Council.

Proceedings in the Security Council kept going on for years together. An atmosphere of uncertainty started prevailing in all spheres of life in Kashmir. To exploit the situation, feelers were being floated and non-government diplomats were sent with proposals of division of the valley by big powers, except Russia, to solve the problem with Pakistan. Even the seeds of making

Kashmir an independent buffer state under United Nations' protection were sown in the minds of some of the leaders. These backdoor manipulations created doubts and misgivings amongst the national leaders in the state as well as at the centre. Vested interests tried to exploit the situation. Major differences grew in the local leadership which were witnessed in the debates of the State's Constituent Assembly when Shyam Lal Saraf, a prominent leader of the National Conference and a senior member of Sheikh Sahib's cabinet refused to resign when asked by the leader in the house to do so. People saw a clear division arising in the ruling National Conference, one led by Sheikh Sahib and the other by Khwaja Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq and a few other leaders. We, in Radio Kashmir, were watching the situation with serious concern..

Sheikh Sahib used to address the masses in *Dargah-e-Sharif Hazratbal* almost every Friday, which we would record on telephone lines in our studios on big Presto discs. These important speeches would then be edited and broadcast at 9.30 pm. the same day. I was in charge of this programme from the time it had started. As there was dual control over the programmes of Radio Kashmir, the political situation made the editing and presentation of these recorded speeches a tricky affair as Sheikh Sahib had started criticizing and blaming the centre for the uncertainty in the political and economic situation in the state. It was becoming terribly difficult to maintain a balance in the final broadcast. Same caution had to be kept in mind in other programmes too. Officers on Special Duty from All India Radio were trying to get the upper hand in policy decisions while the Director General, Information & Broadcasting of the state was asserting to project the state's policies. This tussle kept on increasing day by day and reached a breaking point in August 1953. The political differences prevailing in the valley too had reached a boiling point. The atmosphere had got tense and people were sure that something terrible was going to happen. The political divide in the leadership and rank and file of the National Conference was now in the open. The general public was eagerly waiting to see which faction would win. That was the

situation in the beginning of August. Digitized By eGangotri

It was the Friday before the fateful 9th of August of 1953. We had in the normal course recorded of events Sheikh Sahib's speech at *Hazratbal* to an unprecedented huge crowd. As already mentioned we had only one recording machine and as such we had to give a break for the disc change. This gap would be covered by my linking which would help in the continuity of the speech. Just imagine, it was a live broadcast! I had written the linking and marked the discs and dictated the opening announcement to Yash Sharma who was the announcer on duty, when P.S. Bhatia entered the studio. Giving me a sheet of paper he told me. Delete these portions. Mark them in the records. They must not go on air." There was still some time left for the broadcast to start. So I started to playback the disc to trace the portions that had to be deleted. While doing so I heard a heated discussion going on. I came out of the studio and saw Janki Nath Zutshi, the State Director General of Information & Broadcasting insisting that not a word of the speech was to be deleted. This heated argument was taking an ugly turn and I was looking at them helplessly.

Yash Sharma, waiting for me in the studios, came out and told me that the time of broadcast was fast approaching. I told both Bhatia and Zutshi to decide what was to be done and went back into the studio told Yash Sharma to keep some gramophone records ready and make an apology that due to a technical fault the scheduled programme could not be broadcast. I again came out to see if they had reached a decision. But they were still shouting and challenging each other. The speech therefore was not broadcast as it was past 9.30 p.m., the scheduled time of broadcast. That was the situation which finally culminated into the fateful night of 9th August.

9th August, 1953.

It was 12.30 in the night. We were deep asleep in our one-storey quarters adjacent to Emporium Garden when I was woken up by a loud tapping on the window that opened on to the lawn touching

the road outside, crossing over to our studios. We became fearful. When the knocking was repeated and along with it came the dictates of somebody calling me, I got up and peeped through the window and was surprised to see P.S. Bhatia there in his nightgown. I opened the window to inquire as to what the matter was. He asked me to dress immediately and come out and not to forget to carry my identity card with me. After that he moved to the next quarter where our engineer Abdul Sattar lived. I reassured my wife and ordered her to lock the door.

When I reached the lawn outside, I saw the entire essential staff that had been lodged in those quarters had assembled there. Bhatia asked us to follow him. Nobody dared talk. When we came on to the road we were shocked to see armed soldiers every ten meters. They probably must have been briefed about us by Bhatia when he had come to wake us up. That is why they did not check us. We walked to the studios but were stopped by the army men posted at the gate. They checked our identity cards and then let us in.

We sat in the corridor leading to the studios and the control room. There was pin drop silence. We kept on looking at each other while P. S. Bhatia kept pacing up and down the corridor. He was highly tense stretching his neck right and left, which was his habit. It was around 2.30 am that the telephone in the duty room, which was at the end of the corridor, started ringing. Hearing it, Bhatia rushed into the duty room and banged the door shut so that we wouldn't get to listen to what was transpiring there.

It was after about five minutes that the door opened and Bhatia came out, and walking to us, shook his head and said almost to himself, "So he has finally been arrested." We could not make out who had been arrested. It was after a pause that he told us that it was Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, The Lion of Kashmir who had been arrested. I could not believe it and neither could Prem Nath Pardesi, Mohan Lal Aima, Abdus-s-Sattar, and Som Nath Kachroo who had also been called to the studio. Meanwhile, B.R. Kapoor the Station Engineer too had arrived. P.S. Bhatia did not give us even a few moments to get out of the shock and gave a short lecture

about the emergency that had come up and that we must tighten our belts to face it. He asked the engineers to go and check the transmitter and the other equipment. As curfew had been imposed, no other member of staff, residing in the city, would be able to come, so we had to manage things by ourselves. Mohan Lal Aima was asked to go to the library and sort out appropriate recorded music for broadcast, keeping the situation in mind. Som Nath Kachroo was instructed to look after the Duty Room which was his normal duty. Prem Nath Pardesi was asked to keep abreast of the happenings and feed the written material for broadcast. And I was asked to do the job of the announcer and run the transmission.

P.S. Bhatia took out a paper from his pocket and dictated the announcement that had to be made immediately after the opening of the transmission. I took a paper and sat down to take the dictation. "Pease write" said Bhatia, "*Aaj Sadr-e-Riyasat Dr. Karan Singh ne Shaikh Mohammad Abdullah ko Wazarat-i-Uzma ke ohde se bartaraf kiya aur unhain uske saath hi girfataar kar liya gaya hai.*" (The Sadr-e- Riyasat Dr. Karan Singh has removed Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah from the Premiership of the state following which he has been put under arrest.) Imagine! This poor soul, who up to the other day while presenting the radio reports of Sheikh Sahib's speeches had been announcing his name with honours as *Wazir- i -Azam Jinab-i-Sher-i- Kashmir Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah*, had to be reduced to just Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah.)

He had been our leader and the symbol of what Kashmir stood for. He was a source of inspiration for us when we were members of the Students' Federation. And here I was, preparing myself to make this ominous announcement. I was cursing myself. But a job is a job and I had to do it. The time for the transmission to start was fast approaching. I picked up the recorded disc of our signature tune and entered the studio. I placed the station's signature tune's disc on the turntable and was about to play it, when the door of the studio was thrust open and Ali Mohammad Tariq rushed in, almost panting, followed by the duty officer Som Nath Kachroo. He was holding a paper in his hand and told me to move aside saying that

he would make this announcement. You cannot imagine how relieved I was! I readily stood up and left the chair for him. Being somewhat heavy of weight he could hardly steady his breath. And in that very state he made the announcement that had been earlier dictated to me.

I left him there and came out and heard P.S. Bhatia vehemently explaining something to somebody on the phone, "Sir he told me that he had been sent by you. He was carrying the announcement you had given to him. D. P. Sahib, I will send him back immediately." Bhatia put down the telephone and started walking to the studio. He was fretting and fuming. I asked him what had happened. "It was D.P. Sahib (Durga Prasad Dhar). He asked me who had allowed this man to make the announcement. He was panting as if a gunman was standing at his back with a gun pointed at him. I told him that he had told me that he had been sent by you. To which he replied that they had sent him only to hand over the draft of the announcement." Saying this, he rushed into the studio. I do not know what must have transpired between the two as I had not thought it fit to follow P. S. Bhatia into the studio. After a short while they both came out and Ali Mohammad Tariq rushed to the jeep, in which he had come and without a word, drove away. I thanked my stars and Ali Mohammad Tariq in my heart for he had come to relieve my tension.

We come back to the fateful night of 9th August. As the relay of the National News Bulletin, had started getting relayed immediately after the above announcement from Delhi, we huddled together in the small Duty Room to listen to the news. The first news was that of the dismissal and arrest of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah followed by the news that *Sadr-i-Riyasat* had sworn in Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad as the new Prime Minister. The English news was followed by the news in Urdu, after which we shut the morning transmission down.

We had just started the rescheduling of programmes for the midday and evening transmissions when loud and violent slogans of protest came from across the Polo Ground. We rushed out and

saw a huge procession coming from the *Dalgate* side and proceeding to Bakhshi Sahib's official residence. A column of the armed forces had taken its position inside Polo Ground as well as on the road. We sat on the outside stairs of the studio building to watch this battle between the armed men and the furious mass of public which was swelling, minute by minute. We heard repeated warnings of the army to the crowd to disperse but the crowd did not stop advancing. Then the army fired in the air. But the crowd did not stop shouting slogans and pushed forward. The crowd was getting violent. Seeing the situation turning from bad to worse, the army opened fire. We saw people falling. Undaunted, the protesters lifted those who had fallen and been injured and carried them away. After which, wave after wave of men started arriving and tried to push forward. This battle continued for hours together. We got reports during the day that people everywhere had come out on the streets to protest without caring for their life. This was happening, in spite of the strict curfew that had been clamped. We did not know how many people had died in the clashes with the army and how many were injured. The curfew continued for days together till the people got tired and conditions started to normalize.

Now when I look back and assess what has been happening since then, I strongly believe that it was the third blunder that the Central Government had committed. This situation could have been averted if a genuine and honest dialogue with Sheikh Sahib would have been undertaken without self-seeking intermediaries. The misunderstanding and mistrust would have been cleared as had later on happened around 1964, when Nehru sent Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah to Pakistan and to so called Azad Kashmir, with a mission to try to find a way out to sort out the problem before his death. But damage had been done, and since then we have been trying to repair it by offering sops for which, 'the sky is the limit' within the Indian Constitution. But alas, very few in the valley seem to be buyers of that offer now. The position in the valley which was about only one fifth of the Jammu & Kashmir state has now become the measure for the state's relations with the

Centre. Relating the event time past and the time present, is history and it does not spare any one and only time will finally decide who was responsible for this tragedy of Kashmir.

It was not Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah alone who was arrested. Not only were his close associates sent to jail but also quite a few members of the bureaucracy who were his confidantes were dismissed and held in detention. In Radio Kashmir too there was some purging. Sadr-u-Din Mujahid, a Programme Executive on the staff, a renowned political worker and a sincere follower of Sheikh Sahib, did not hesitate to prefer arrest to the nice job he could have retained. Another person from the state cadre who was heading Radio Kashmir Srinagar was Hakim Ghulam Mohi-ud-Din. He too professed to be one of the most trusted followers of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. But he kept on vacillating and did not have the guts that Sadr-ud-Din Mujahid had, to resign. He preferred his job and continued for some time but was dismissed when discovered indulging in 'anti-national activities'.



SWEARING IN OF BAKHSHI GHULAM MOHAMMAD AND HIS CABINET.

Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad had taken charge immediately after Sheikh Sahib's arrest. And Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq, D.P.Dhar, Mir Qasim and other ministers were sworn in later on. While the ceremony of their oath-taking was going on at Dr. Karan Singh's residence, *Tale Manzil Palace*, an unexpected development took place. We were busy in the studios when we heard slogans of *Wazir-i- Azim Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad Zindabad!* and *Azad Hindustan Zidabad!* We came out and saw a crowd moving slowly from the western end of Polo Ground towards the Radio Station. Credit should go to P. S. Bhatia for his intuition. He asked the engineers to somehow arrange to record this crowd and their slogans. There was no tape recording facility in those days. The recording had to be done in the studio and that too on discs. The engineers came into action. They broke a glass pane of the window of the small studio from where we used to broadcast our *Pushtu* programmes. This window was nearest to the road outside. They took out the microphone with a long cable through this gap and pulled the cable to reach the road. By this time this procession of about a couple of hundred odd people had almost reached the gate of the Station. It was a sight to see. An open truck was moving ahead of this 'procession'. I could recognize the short handsome *Nath Ji Braroo* of *Badiyar* leading and shouting slogans. He was a worker of the National Conference, loyal to Bakhshi Sahib. It was he who had gathered those people from his area and taken out this procession. There was a huge willow basket full of pears in the truck which he would distribute to this crowd. We requested him

to move the truck closer to the microphone so that we could record them. It was Prem Sagar Bhatia's intuition again that had resulted in this kind of an action. He had meanwhile rung up *Tale Manzil* and requested the new Prime Minister Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad to return via Radio Kashmir as a crowd supporting him had gathered over there.

He then informed this small crowd that Bakhshi Sahib would be coming there. This news infused fresh fervour into the crowd and vigour in their slogans. The wait was not long and Bakhshi Sahib's cavalcade appeared to be approaching. Nathji Braroo and the crowd's throats turned hoarse shouting slogans *Bakhshi Sahib Zindabad, Azad Hindustan Zindabad*. Bakhshi Sahib climbed up the truck and from it thanked these people and addressed them promising them peace and a bright future, the future of Naya Kashmir. This was, so to say, Bakhshi Sahib's first public speech after becoming the Prime Minister. A radio report on this speech was later on broadcast and its recording sent by air to Delhi.

A day after this Bakhshi Sahib came to the studio for a live broadcast to the people of the state. This was the first broadcast of a leader from our studio which had to be relayed simultaneously by all stations of All India Radio to convey to the nation that normalcy was fast returning to Kashmir. I was given the responsibility to make the announcement and conduct Bakhshi Sahib in our Talks Studio.

The talk was scheduled to go on air at 9.30 pm. Bakhshi Sahib arrived around nine at the studios. He was received by P.S. Bhatia and the staff and then straightaway ushered into the Talks Studio. I was already in the studio, fixing the pages of the speech on cardboard to avoid any rustling of the paper which was considered a big fault then. I stood to offer my salutation and made him sit comfortably. Turning to Bhatia Sahib, Bakhshi Sahib said with a smile, "You had never given me a chance to broadcast earlier so I feel somewhat nervous." Bhatia wanted to say something but Bakhshi Sahib stopped him. "Don't worry, I won't disappoint you. Now please let me alone so that I can read the script and rehearse

with him." As soon as Bhatia left the studio, Bakhshi Sahib asked for the script he had sent. I placed the heap of the cardboard pieces before him. "What is this? Give me the pages!" When I explained to him why I had clipped the sheets to boards, he started going through the script. After finishing and marking the pauses he said to me that he was really a little nervous not because it was his first direct broadcast but by imagining that the whole nation would be listening to him. "Don't think of it sir. This is my first announcement also that is being relayed by all the stations of All India Radio." By now it was 9.25pm. I collected the boards and put them in order and placed the first board in front of him and said that after making the announcement I would keep on passing the rest of the pages one, by one as pasted on the cardboards for his convenience. Needless to say, that when his broadcast was over and I had made the closing announcement, he looked at me and asked, "How was it?" "Excellent, sir!" And it really was. No faltering and no fumbling had taken place. There was a convincing confidence in his voice. And it was this confidence of his, through which he had gained the support of the masses, sooner than what people had expected.

In order to win over the grass-root workers of The National Conference throughout the valley and to explain to them why Sheikh Sahib had to be removed, the new regime led by Bakhshi Sahib held a convention in the Emporium Garden in which hundreds of National Conference workers were brought in buses from towns and village. Arrangements for their boarding and lodging were made in the garden itself. We were a witness to all the proceedings first, because we were covering it for broadcast, second, because of our office being just outside the gate of the Emporium. So we were able to watch the crowds coming in and going out. There was a big team of *wazas* cooking Kashmiri *wazawan* and whosoever would join the convention as a participant or as a spectator, could partake of the delicacies. The satirist Kashmiri did not spare even this convention by naming it '*a Khenvention (a session of feasting)*'. This continued for quite a few days. The outcome of this convention

SWEARING IN OF BAKHSHI GHULAM

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was that a roadmap was drawn for the mitigation of the difficulties that had arisen for the people of Kashmir because of the uncertain political situation. The first decision that was taken was that rice should be sold at government depots at an unimaginable low price of three *annas per seer* (slightly less than a kilo). This turned the tide and Bakhshi Sahib and his government started gaining ground in the public mind. It was the biggest relief as there was extreme shortage of foodgrain especially of rice in the valley and people were issued maize and even potatoes as substitutes for rice earlier through government ration shops. It was the introduction of many such reforms and plans for development that made it possible for Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad's government to rule the state for almost a decade with development taking place all around.



GOVERNMENT OF INDIA TAKES OVER RADIO KASHMIR.

First April, 1954 will remain an important date for broadcasting in the state of Jammu & Kashmir when the two major stations, Radio Kashmir Srinagar and Radio Kashmir Jammu became part of All India Radio. There were long discussions between B. V. Keskar, the then Minister for Information & Broadcasting, Government of India who had come to Srinagar to complete the formalities and Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad, about the rechristening the organisation. We were eagerly awaiting the final decision. It was finally decided that the name Radio Kashmir should not be changed, first because Kashmir had a special status in the Indian Constitution. Secondly by changing the name to All India Radio, the affinity and the feeling the common man had developed with the name Radio Kashmir would be compromised with. And finally, that under this name, we would also be able to strongly rebut Pakistan for the propaganda it was continually blaring from the radio station in its occupied area.

A veteran broadcaster, P. C. Chatterji was posted by All India Radio as the first Station Director of Radio Kashmir Srinagar after the takeover. He had to supervise and co-ordinate with Radio Kashmir Jammu too, where Sardar Iqbal Singh, an Assistant Station Director was made in-charge. A gem of a human being who had been coming to Kashmir along with his father (the great J.C. Chatterji who was *Chairman of the University Grants Commission*) almost regularly, from his very boyhood, P. C. Chatterji had great love for Kashmir. He could even understand the Kashmiri language and regretted that he hadn't learnt to speak it. He was a strict

administrator when in office but after working hours he would mingle with us socially and became a friend ever ready to help.

He would even come in his own car to drop artists home if the station transport was found lacking. A group of us, with Mohammad Abdullah of Rural Programme as our guide, had got interested in fishing. P. C. Chatterji too was a keen angler and expert in trout fishing. As such he became almost a pal of Mohammad Abdullah and would carry him along, when he would go to the trout beats away from the city for fishing. He was a great lover of Kashmiri music and travelled far and wide to hunt talent. In fact it was he who had discovered Ghulam Nabi Dolwal from *Kishtawar* who became a rage with his unique style of singing. I may be allowed to once again digress a little here.

Talking about P. C. Chatterji, the Time Machine now rushes forward. It was the year 1994 when I had come for a break from Bombay to my residence in Pune. I got a call over the telephone and the voice said, "Hi Pran, do you recognise me?" I was surprised. How could I not have recognised Chatterji Sahib's soft effeminate voice? "Chatterji Sahib! How couldn't I have recognised your voice having all through my career dealt with voices?" "Badmash! I thought that talent might have got lost in the glamour of the film world!" "Sir, whatever happens, I shall always remain basically a broadcaster!" It was after nearly twenty years that I was talking to him. He had retired as Director General of All India Radio and Doordarshan many years ago. So had I! He was in Pune along with his wife Lola to meet his son who was Professor with the Yashwant Rao Chauhan Institute of Management in Pune.

I went the same evening with Shanta, my wife, to meet them at their son's residence. Both of them met us with great affection. We invited them for dinner the next evening. Shanta had cooked an authentic Kashmiri meal which reminded them of the couple of dinners they had had with us when he would come to visit Kashmir as Director-General. Both of them liked a drink. So before the meal we offered them some Scotch and *Tabak Maaz* for starters. After dinner, Chatterji Sahib asked whether I had some Kashmiri music.

When I replied I had lots of it he questioned, "Raj Begum too?" When I told him that I had, he got excited and asked me to play *Maesh ravthus janana tce kar yaad pemai bo*. While listening to the song, Chatterji Sahib closed his eyes and started sobbing and tears flowed down his eyes. His crying became almost uncontrollable. He wailed. "O God! What have we done to Kashmir!" The atmosphere got drowned in gloom and in silence we listened to Kashmiri music song after song till late in the night, That was P. C. Chatterji, a great lover of Kashmir!

Now, back to the main narrative! I remember vividly how he argued and fought with the Director General of A.I.R. Jagdish Chander Mathur (the last I. C. S. officer under the British Government) when a separate Production cadre was created to introduce professionalism in All India Radio. In order to implement it, great litterateurs like Josh Malihabadi, Sumitra Nandan Punth, Saghar Nizami, Ram Dhari Singh Dinkar, P.L.Deshpandey and musicians like Pundit Ravi Shankar, Anil Biswas, Ustad Ali Akber Khan and many others were motivated to join as Advisors and Producers. When the question of employing similar well known persons for Radio Kashmir Srinagar came up, he put his foot down and argued that competent people from the organisation itself, could be more effective in bringing required professionalism in the system than people from outside. It was his honest belief and he fought for it. That is how Ali Mohammad Lone, Pushkar Bhan and Pran Kishore became Producers and In-charge of their sections as mentioned earlier.

Recording of programmes outside the studios for broadcast on Portable Magnetic Tape recorders was introduced during P. C. Chatterji's tenure. After the engineers gave a demonstration on how to use them I started feeling restless and wanted to go out in the field and record there. To make a start I drafted a proposal to make a Radio Documentary on the life of *Gujjars* who had fascinated me from my college days when I would meet them in the *Tangmarg* and *Gul Marg* slopes, where I would go to spend a few days with a childhood friend whose brother was a forest officer

there. I had proposed a tour of three days in the *Wangat* area which is the main centre of *Gujjar* in Kashmir. I sent the file to Chatterji Sahib for his approval. After some time he sent the file back with the order that I should go in the morning and return by evening. I was upset as to how I could explore the area and find knowledgeable *Gujjar*, in one day who could talk about their life and customs. It was not possible. Even the travel to-and-fro would take that much time. I picked up the file and waited to enter his room as some old *ponywalas* and villagers, his old acquaintances from *Gulmarg* had come to meet him. Such people would often come to meet their 'Tiny Baba', that was his pet name. Anyway, when they left, I went in and explained to him what my idea of the documentary was. He said all this can be done in one day. The station car cannot be kept there for so many days. I argued back and finally said that it was better to drop the idea and left the file there and moved to leave the room. Unfortunately, the door got shut with a bang because of the pressure of a gust of wind. I felt sorry for not having held the door and closed it gently. Anyway I went to my room feeling upset. After a few minutes Chatterji Sahib sent for me. I thought he must have been annoyed because the door had banged after me.

When I sought permission to enter, he signalled to me with his hand to enter and to sit. When I took the chair in front of him, he pulled out the drawer of his table and took out a box of Hawaiian cigars and offering me one sternly told me to take it. Those costly cigars used to be sent to him by his friends. I took the cigar which he lit for me. He lit one for himself. Then he pushed the file to me and casting a deep look at me said, "Listen! If you want to rise in your profession, never argue with your boss. Open the file and see my noting." Needless to say, he had written in the file after discussing with the Producer "I feel he is right. The proposal is approved." I thanked him and went to my room. In spite of his advice I did not stop arguing wherever I felt I was right and that had helped me do my best. He was very happy with my *Gujjar* Documentary and learning from his experiences and working with him I became one of his blue eyed boys and later on a friend.

Pran Kishore outside
convention hall Mifed, Milan
Italy the venue for XXX Prix
Italia Festival



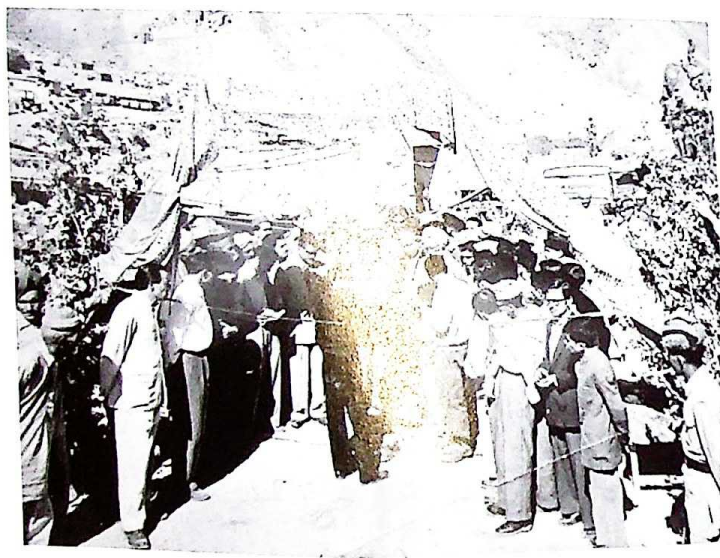
The last observation post of
our army in Thako Chak: A.L.
Maini, Pran Kishore and sound
engineer Kilam with the CO of
the unit and other officers.

The recording team on the
blasted Mandala bridge on
Munawar Tawi to stop the
advancing army from Chamb.



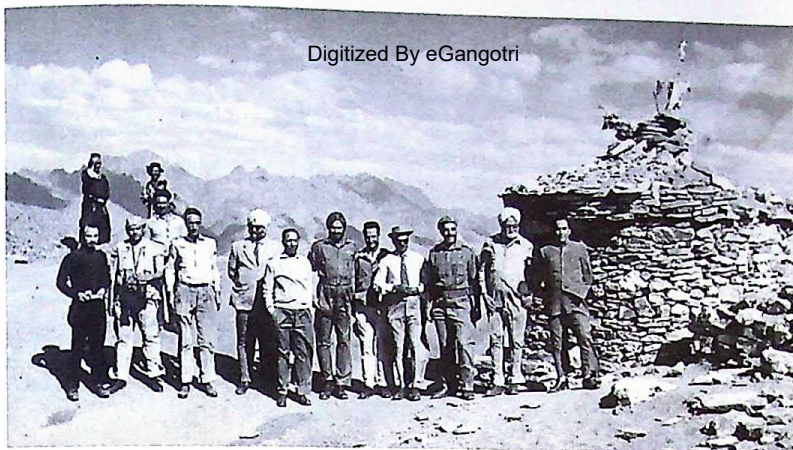
The memorial in memory of the martyrdom of Brig. Mohammad Usman at the exact spot where he fell after clearing the entire area from Jhangarh to Poonch from the enemy occupation in 1949.

Pran Kishore
recording
the opening of Kargil
- Leh road.



The narrow unfinished road
at Lamayaru.





Chuni Lal Kotwal, Sonam Norbo, Col Raja, Sir Dattar Singh, Brig Wadera and Pran Kishore and the press party at Fatola, 1200 ft above sea level.

Recording an interview with the in charge of the oldest monastery of Alchi. Mark the 40ft. tall statue of Maitri in the background.



A Drogpa lass. mark the sharp Aryan features. Drogpas claim to be the purest Aryan reatures.

With the Everest hero Sonam Wangyal at his house in Leh displaying all the equipment and other accessories he used in the climb. Zutshi trying the Sonam's jacket.



Rajwali Khan whom we met in Bafliaz.



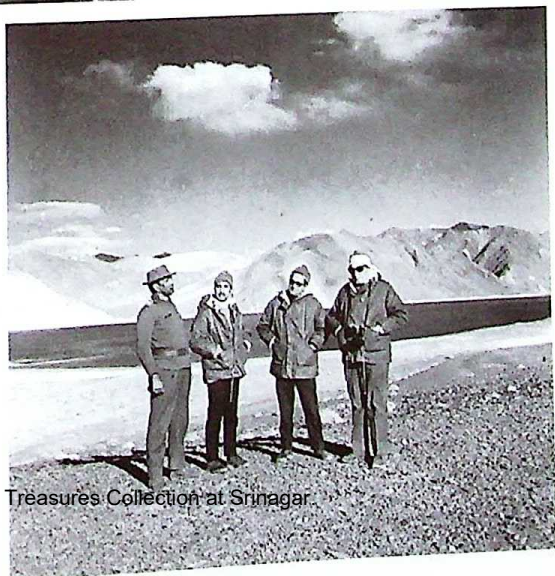
His sheep and goat herd.

Rajwali's
Grand daughters



A bakarwal lass with typical
decorated cap.

Army P.R.O. Maj. Bhardwaj,
A.L., Maini, Pran Kishore,
Moti Lal Kaul at Pangong lake
which was an area not open to
civilians at that time.



Pran Kishore travelling on
army mule towards
Lipa Valley.

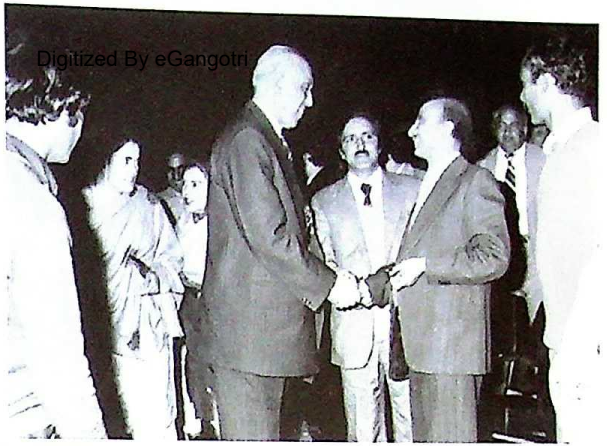


The team with the army P.R.O. Maj. Bhradwaj on the left, on top of
Rajdhani Pass before going down to Gurez on the other side.



Syed Mir Qasim the Chief Minister &
President of the Jammu & Kashmir
Academy, bestowing Robe of Honour
on Pran Kishore for his outstanding
contribution to drama and theatre in
the state.

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah
congratulating Pran Kishore
for the direction of the opera
Tipu Sultan for the State
Academy. Secretary
Mohammad Yusuf Taing and
Begum Abdullah watching.

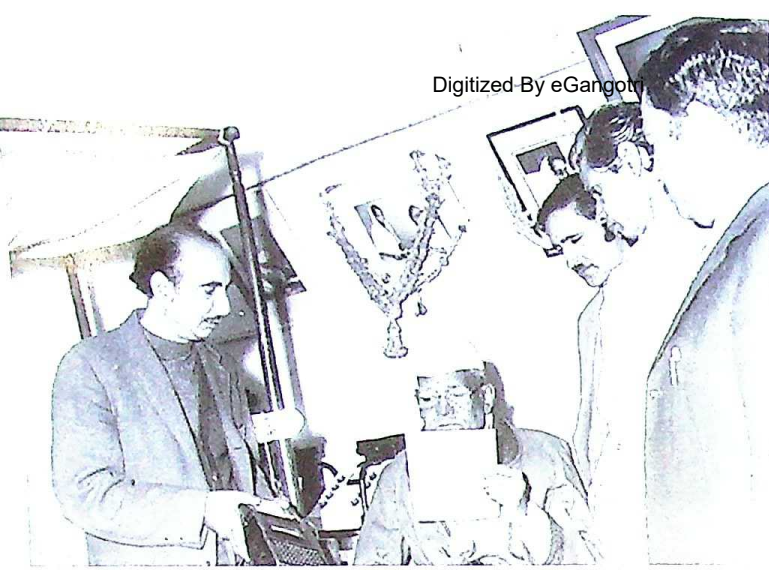


Akashvani Annual Award
for Drama.

Akashvani Annual Award for
Documentary feature.



National Award For
Broadcasting
(Akashvani Annual
Award)



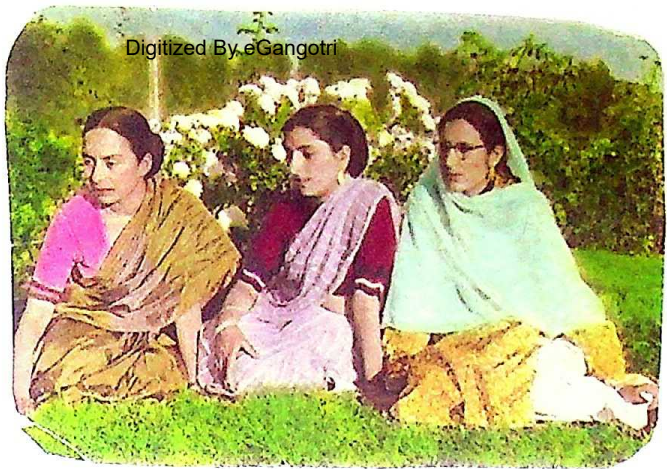
Recording a message for the Kashmir Festival in Patna in his humble bedroom by the great socialist leader, Jaya Prakash Narain during. Mohammad Yusuf Taing and others in the photo graph.

After recording Runa Laila in Radio Kashmir, Srinagar studio.

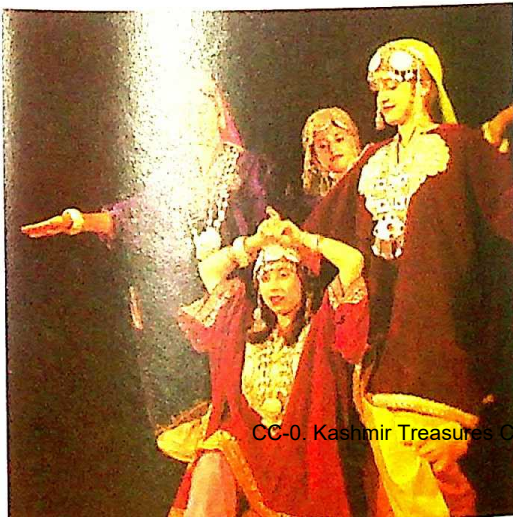


With Dr. Sanjiva Reddy, President of India in Kamani Auditorium Delhi After the performance of the opera Piya Baj Pyala.

Tahira Hasan,
Taj Begum Renzoo,
Shanta Kaul
In the lawns of
Polo Ground Studio.



Kashmiri artists in Festival of 12th Festival of Asian Arts after the final
performance in the City Hall Hong Kong.



A dance number by Laxmi,
Bushra and Pammi in the City
Hall Hong Kong.



Receiving J&K State Award from the Governor Shri N.N. Vohra.



Pran Kishore Kaul receiving the Padma Shri Award for Outstanding Contribution to Arts & Literature from the President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind, 2018.

30th PRE-ITALIA FESTIVAL & ANNUAL MEETING OF ITS GENERAL COUNCIL : 1978

The year 1978 was auspicious for Radio Kashmir Srinagar and for me. It had bagged the coveted *Akashvani Annual Award* for the Best Radio Documentary for the documentary, *Aab Ta Hayath* written, produced and presented by me just after only one year after bagging the Award for the play 'Ta Vyeth Rooz Pakan.' The same year the documentary was selected as All India Radio's official entry to the XXX PRIX- ITALIA FESTIVAL to be held in Milan, Italy. Besides this honour I was nominated as a member of The International Jury for Radio & Television for the same Festival – the most prestigious Festival for Broadcasting. In addition to this, I was nominated by the I & B Ministry as a delegate to its General Council too. P. C. Chatterji had become Director General of both All India Radio & Doordarshan by then. He was very happy for me more than anybody else. When I went to Delhi to collect my passport I went to see him. He called the Deputy Director, Administration and told him to go to the Finance Ministry and get the clause of normal Daily Allowance changed to Actual Boarding & Lodging expenses besides the normal D.A. "The place is damn expensive. I have personal experience. I don't want him to starve there." He turned to the Deputy Director. I had no idea of this. Needless to say, he got it done and when I was about to leave his room he called me back and opened the safe shelf in his cupboard and took out a hundred dollar bill and a fifty pound note and insisted that I keep them, saying, "Spend this money. I had saved these from my last tour abroad, you will need them there the place down expensive." Imagine those were the days when there was strict

foreign exchange restriction. I was overwhelmed with gratitude. That was P. C. Chatterji, an excellent human being.

P. C. Chatterji was a man of principles, undaunted and fearless. Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad had established himself as a very efficient administrator and was doing his best for the welfare of the people. But what normally happens in such situations is that those who rise to power get gradually surrounded by self seekers and sycophants who use their clout for personal gain. Many such people used to get closer and closer to Bakhshi Sahib. Like every Kashmiri, Bakhshi Sahib was in love with Kashmiri music and would make music a part of his official as well as private parties. It so happened in the year 1956 that he had organised such a get-together one evening in the month of October. Some members of his personal staff rang up the Station Director P. C. Chatterji to say that Bakhshi Sahib wanted Raj Begum to sing in the function in the evening at his official residence. P. C. Chatterji told the man that he would check the cue sheet of the evening broadcasts and then let him know. When he checked the cue sheet, he saw that Raj Begum was the artist of the day and her music items were the highlights of the evening transmission.

When the official rang up again, P. C. Chatterji told him that since she was the artist of the day and since she had to sing in a couple of our important programmes in the evening she could not be spared. The man had not expected such a reply. God knows what twist he must have given to Chatterji Sahib's reply while passing it on to Bakhshi Sahib. Because now Bakhshi Sahib's Private Secretary was on the line conveying Bakhshi Sahib's displeasure and asked Mr. Chatterji to cancel the programmes and send the artist in the evening. "It is important, don't you realise?" Now it was Mr. Chatterji who lost his cool and told the P. A. "Tell Bakhshi Sahib that my programmes are more important than a private party." And put the receiver down. All this happened when we were having a meeting in his room. He turned to us and said, "Don't send her."

The next day, Chatterji's P. A. told us that he had, immediately

after the meeting, rung up the Director General and told him what had happened. He had further asked for an immediate transfer because he was bound to have such demands from the state government authorities and he was not used to such dictates that affected his programme schedules. . His request was acceded to, and he was transferred within a few days to Kolkatta, the station of his choice.

■■■

1957: NATIONAL CONFERENCE GETS DIVIDED AND DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONFERENCE FORMED

Arrogance had crept into the behaviour of the workers of the National Conference close to Bakhshi Sahib. They were interfering in the working of the administration thereby breeding corruption in the system. This started creating a wedge between Bakhshi Sahib and Kh. Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq and some other important members of the cabinet. Gradually, this became talk of the town. Naturally this affected the working of the government. Ali Mohammad Lone and I had remained associated with the National Cultural Conference even after our joining Radio Kashmir. As Sadiq Sahib had continued to be its patron we were thought to be Sadiq Sahib's men, in spite of having had no political association with any party. We had sought proper permission to be members of this Cultural Association and participated in its activities for the cultural development of the state especially in the field of theatre and literature. But it was a fact that both of us were wedded to Marxist thought so close to Sadiq Sahib.

It was during this period the First Kashmir Festival in Srinagar was announced. Every cultural organisation started preparing for it. The government, on its part, planned the production of an *Opera Heemal Naigrai*. This created a rift in the National Cultural Conference because two of our important members Dina Nath Nadim and Noor Mohammad Roshan had shifted loyalties and offered to jointly write the said opera for the governmental committee. For its staging, an open air stage was built in the southern part of *Hazoori Bagh* now called Iqbal Park.

We, the members of the National Cultural Conference, planned

to stage Ali Mohammad Lone's anti-war play *Deevaney Ka Khwab* to be directed by me to be staged during this festival. For staging this play we had booked Neadou's Hotel Hall. Because of the magnitude and wide publicity for the Kashmir Festival, a large contingent of the National Press had arrived in Srinagar. Even Raj Kapoor and Nargis, along with many artists from outside the state had been invited to participate in the Festival. Unfortunately, the opera *Heema Naigrai* did not fare well. And it did not get good reviews either from the press or the spectators, while our play *Deevane Ka Khwab* got rave reviews from the national as well as the local press and the audience. The failure of the opera was contributed to the opera's presentation in the open. So it was decided that the opera should be staged in an auditorium. Our booking therefore of the Neadou's Hotel Hall was cancelled and the opera shifted there. We did not give up and shifted our play to S. P. College Hall. It is a different thing that the opera, even after having been shifted to a hall, did not do well. On the other hand, *Deewaney Ka Khwab* became so successful that we were invited for the All State Writers Meet sponsored by the Dogri Writers Association, Jammu, to present it there.

This whole episode created a lot of jealousy in those friends who were actively associated with the production of *Heemal Naigrai*. They started conveying to their patrons who were at that time all powerful in The National Conference, concocted tales of our being communists actively involved in politics on the quiet. They motivated some of the second rank Kashmiri officers posted in the Directorate of All India Radio, who were playing to the tune of the dictates of those leaders of the National Conference working against the Sadiq group to somehow avenge themselves.

The political situation reached a point where, in spite of the mediation of the Centre, Sadiq Sahib, Syed Mir Qasim, D. P. Dhar, Abdul Ghani Lone and others left the National Conference and formed a separate party under the name of the Democratic National Conference. This was a golden opportunity for our adversaries in the Radio who acted as agents of the power hungry faction of

National Conference, to poison minds against Ali Mohammad Lone and me. They did succeed in getting me transferred to Jalandhar and Ali Mohammad Lone to Delhi. Another victim of that reign of suspicion and conspiracies in Radio Kashmir Srinagar, was Bashir Butt. Those sycophants who had worked for our transfer had carried a casual remark of Bashir Butt that Bakhshi Sahib has lots of things to do. He need not have worried about our music as we were there to look after it. This remark, in the course of reviewing our programmes in the daily Programme Meeting, was played up and carried to the Seat of Power and Bashir Butt was also transferred to Jalandhar in spite of being a close relative of Bakhshi Sahib. In a way, it was a blessing for it gave us the opportunity to live together for two years. (*Some details of our working in Jullundur have been recorded earlier.*)

It was after just a few months when we had gained a firm footing and a fair amount of popularity there in Jalandhar, that the Station Director D. K. Sengupta told us that he had been verbally told by the Officer On Special Duty in the Directorate working for Kashmiri affairs in A.I.R. to be very careful about us. And when we asked him what he had found. "I am fortunate that I have you here. You have given a new life to *Sada-e-Watan*, almost a dead programme. I wonder why he should have told me what he did." There was nothing in writing. So, every manipulation had been done verbally. The Director General had been told that we, being experts in counter propaganda programmes, were urgently needed to make the daily programme *Sada-e-Watan* from All India Radio, Jalandhar as powerful as the counter propaganda programmes from Radio Kashmir Srinagar.

It was after nearly two years that the Director General J. C. Mathur came on an official visit to Jalandhar. Discussing different programmes of the station the Station Director highlighted the daily programme *Sada-e-Watan*. The Director General said that he was happy as he too had been receiving good reports about it from different quarters. He turned to both Bashir and me and said, "Now that the programme is established, what are you doing here? You

must go back. We need you there in Srinagar. Turning to Sengupta, he said, "I shall send their transfer orders when I am back in Delhi. Relieve them as soon as the order reaches you." That was another exposure of the manipulation that our 'well-wishers' had been doing. Needless to say, the orders of our transfers were soon received. Ali Mohammad Lone too was transferred back from Delhi after that.

Another victim of this manipulation was our friend Ghulam Rasool Qadri. His fault was that he had passed some remark on a musician *Satlat Sitari* who was a great favourite of Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad. For this, Ghulam Rasool Qadri was transferred to far away Nagpur. Even a man of Mir Ghulam Rasool Nazki's stature was not spared by those sycophants. He too was transferred to Nagpur. I am sure that Bakhshi Sahib must not have known what was happening and how his name was being misused.

By the middle of October 1959, Bashir Butt, Ali Mohammad Lone and I were back in Srinagar. During our absence the political scenario had once again changed in Kashmir. Differences between Bakhshi Sahib and Sadiq Sahib had been patched up, obviously after the Central leadership's mediation. The runaway group had again joined the Cabinet. An unending stream of people kept going to Sadiq Sahib's residence in Gagribal to congratulate him. He had come on a visit to Srinagar with the offices still being in Jammu. It was a Sunday and I had gone to Ali Mohammad Lone's house in Dalgate. Watching so many people going to meet Sadiq Sahib, Lone suggested that it would be great fun to see what was happening there at Sadiq Sahib's residence. So we too reached there. The whole garden was full of people. Most of the people were turncoats. We saw Sadiq Sahib sitting in a corner of the garden. We inched our way through the crowd. Sadiq Sahib noticing us, bade us to his side and in his typical way said, "So you too have come to register your allegiance!" Lone replied, "We saw these crowds hurrying to come here, so we thought let us also go to see how fast people change colours."

"Nothing new," he remarked and looked around. One of the

Chief Engineers, an ardent follower of Bakhshi Sahib came rushing through the crowd. By this time, Sadiq Sahib made us sit saying, "Sit here and watch the show." The Chief Engineer almost doubled himself while holding Sadiq Sahib's hand and touching his forehead with it. Sadiq Sahib made him sit and asked about his welfare.

"Sir we were waiting for this day, I mean the whole of the Engineering fraternity. We are sure that the proposed scales of our pay will be accepted since you have kindly accepted the charge of our ministry. Our salaries are really low."

Sadiq Sahib turned to us and said, "Do you know what Biscoe Sahib would do while admitting boys to his school? During filling the forms he would ask the student his father's name, his profession and his salary. Biscoe Sahib would carefully enter the columns himself. Profession: Clerk in Public Works Department: Good. Monthly salary: INR 15/- (Rupees fifteen), and then Biscoe sahib would add, 'plus loot'." Sadiq Sahib then suddenly turning to the chief engineer said, "Why should you bother about the salary?" The Chief Engineer could not utter a word and thought it better to leave. Sadiq Sahab looked at us and smiled.



ALL STATE ENGINEERS CONFERENCE IN THE TOURIST CENTRE HALL.

I am a witness to another such incident which was one of the worst jibes on corrupt engineers. The engineers working in the state had organised a huge conference in the Tourist Reception Centre Hall in Srinagar (now no more there) in which hundreds of engineers participated. This conference was to be inaugurated by Prime Minister Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad. I had gone with my recording team to cover it. The welcome address was more of a charter of demands and a bundle of pleas for the mitigation of the engineers' difficulties. I was sitting along with my engineers very close to the stage. While the welcome address was being read out, I watched the reaction of Bakhshi Sahib. His face had become tense and when the address was over, he got up and looked at me and said, "Don't record!" I signalled to my engineer to stop recording. Bakhshi Sahib addressed one of the Chief Engineers sitting in the front row by name and asked him to stand up. The man obeyed. Bakhshi Sahib then started giving details of the properties the man had built. The lands he had purchased. Even the deposits he had in the banks. The man stood as a culprit with his head hung. Finishing with him, Bakhshi Sahib asked him to sit and then called another senior chief engineer and started divulging details of his amassed wealth. The man began to feel miserable. In this way, Bakhshi sahib exposed many other known engineers and in a terse voice told them, "You probably thought that I was unaware of what was happening in my government. After all this, you are putting up these silly demands and laying accusations on my government that it does not care for you. Bakhshi knows every bit of who is doing

what and where it is being done." There was pin-drop silence in the hall.

After giving vent to his anger, Bakhshi Sahib asked me to start recording. He then gave a speech in which he lauded the role the engineers were playing in the development of the state and how they were making the lives of people easier by doing a good job. So on and so forth. Those were the traits of that excellent administrator by which he ruled the state for ten years with aplomb.

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CLOUD BURST IN PAHALGAM

It was the year 1963. The beautiful tourist resort of Pahalgam was struck by a terrific cloud burst resulting in a devastating landslide which swept a huge portion of the mountain overhanging the area that covers the portion of the road entering the valley. This landslide had wiped off huts that had come in its way including more than half of a well known hotel. It had even caused some deaths. The landslide had brought down big rocks along with muck with it. This included a gigantic boulder that rested squarely in the middle of the road blocking all traffic. The smaller rocks and the muck had been removed but the huge boulder could not be. This calamity naturally made alarming news. Khwaja Mohammad Yusuf who was Station Director then, called me in the evening and said that we must leave early in the morning for Pahalgam to cover this tragic incident. In fact, he had got the message that Bakhshi Sahib who too was in Delhi was on his way to Pahalgam. So, all the arrangements were made and Khwaja Mohammad Yusuf and I, along with the recording engineer left for Pahalgam around four o'clock in the morning.

The sun was rising when we reached Pahalgam and came to know that Bakhshi Sahib, who had travelled all through the night, had already reached and was in the new rest-house that had been built in the forest above the bend of the road near the entrance to the valley. So, we waded our way up, to this new rest house. The scene on the drive was so mesmerising that we for a moment, forgot about the tragedy that had befallen Pahalgam.

When we finally reached that heavenly surroundings, where

the rest-house had been built, we were led to the balcony of the drawing room. Bakhshi Sahib, who was having his breakfast, noticed us and asked Mr Warikoo his personal secretary to arrange for something for us to eat. That was another great trait of Bakhshi Sahib. He would look after anyone who would come to meet him. Needless to say, a full breakfast was brought by the time we entered and paid our respects to Bakhshi Sahib who bid us seated. Bakhshi Sahib finished with his breakfast and went to change. He returned by the time we too had finished eating and asked us to follow him. "Let me first check what has actually happened and then I shall talk to you."

When we came down and reached the spot we saw a big crowd near that giant of a rock. Seeing Bakhshi Sahib coming, the crowd turned restive. The Chief Engineer and his staff tried to narrate as to what had happened. Bakhshi Sahib got irritated and told them, "I have already been told that. Tell me why this boulder is still here, stopping all traffic." The Chief Engineer told him that the rock could not be moved and they had requested the Border Roads Organization Chief to send his men to blast it. Bakhshi Sahib cast a look of annoyance at him and turned to the big group of labourers and said, "It is a shame that with so many strong jawans around, this stone cannot be moved from here (Turning to the chief engineer), Chief Sahib pay them twice their wages and let them have '*chhutti*' after they finish this task. See, how they can move even a mountain. Come, brave men! Come on." Saying this, he took a crowbar from one of the labourer's hands and thrust it under the rock. The entire group of labourers got charged and exerting all their might, made the rock move. With another strong push the rock rolled down the slope and fell into the water of the river *Lidder* flowing below. The entire crowd cheered in jubilation.

Bakhshi Sahib knew the pulse of the people like nobody else. After getting the road cleared for traffic, Bakhshi Sahib walked to survey the areas that had been affected by the cloudburst. He met everybody who had lost his house including the hotel owner and the tourists who had been stranded. We were accompanying him

along with the press party that had meanwhile arrived from Srinagar. We returned in the evening and broadcast a radio report on this disaster the same night.

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THIRD OCTOBER 1963, KAMRAJ PLAN AND BAKHSHI SAHIB'S RESIGNATION

The year 1963 was a year of turmoil for the Congress party at the Centre. The state units too were feeling that some major steps were being planned to tighten the grip of the party over the masses. Indira Gandhi wanted to change the leadership in quite a few states where the Congress was ruling. Political parleys were going on under the seasoned leader Kamraj. On the pretext of infusing new vigour into the working of the party, it was decided that quite a few tall state leaders should be motivated to resign from the government and work to strengthen the party. The Punjab's Sardar Partap Singh Kairon, Biju Patnaik, Chief Minister of Orissa and Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad, Prime Minister of Jammu & Kashmir were advised to tender their resignations.

This decision of Bakhshi Sahib led to a revolt in his party. Protest demonstrations continued for days together. It was because of the tact in handling such situations that made his followers see reason and the protests waned and discussions were started to find the member from the party who could head the cabinet. It was finally decided that Khwaja Shams-ud- Din who was a senior minister in the cabinet be sworn in as the new Prime Minister.

The date for the swearing-in ceremony was fixed for 26th December. Along with the engineers, I reached the *Tale Manzil Palace*, the private residence of Dr. Karan Singh, the Sadr-e- Riyasat much before the ceremony could start. When we entered the hall where the function was to take place we saw Dr. Sahib in his night gown seated and signing some papers, probably the oath documents. Without raising his head, he said, "So, you people have arrived,

come in! *Kya record karna hai issey?!* Or you want to record this 'great show' for posterity?" He didn't seem happy and asked us to start our job and left the room.

By the time we finished installing our equipment, Kh. Mohammad Yusuf too arrived and then a chain of the higher-ups in the official machinery, members of the legislature and important citizens came and filled the hall. And last of all, Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad arrived, bringing Kh. Shams-u-Din in a brand new suit, along with him. They were followed by other members of the new cabinet. All of them were glowing in smartly tailored suits. As they entered the hall, everybody stood up and cheered.

Introducing Khwaja Shams-u-Din and his would-be-cabinet colleagues, Bakhshi Sahib said, "See! I am giving you an all-lawyer cabinet." It was a fact because almost all the new ministers were law graduates. Dr. Karan Singh, known for his punctuality, arrived on time and the ceremony started.

After the ceremony was over, everyone came out on to the lawns. I took the portable tape recorder and approached the new Prime Minister, Khwaja Shams-ud-Din, to record his reactions and his programmes. He felt a little uneasy and hastily told me to first talk to Bakhshi Sahib which of course I did. Then Bakhshi sahib took Shams-u-Din aside, obviously to brief him about the message he should record for that broadcast.



SAD EVENT OF THE THEFT OF MOO-E-MUQQADAS

The dawn of the twenty-sixth day of December, 1964, brought the shattering news that some knave had broken into the strong-room at *Asari Shareef* at *Hazralbal* and the holy relic of Prophet Hazrat Mohammad had been stolen. The entire city of Srinagar was out in the streets, wailing and weeping. We were immediately summoned to the studios to change the scheduled programmes to confirm. While we were busy at this job, news came in that the protesting crowds had lost self-control and violence had broken out in Civil Lines. They had gutted quite a few areas in *Lal Chowk* and set the cinema halls *Amrish* and *Regal*, both belonging to Bakhshi Sahib's relatives, afire. Another newsflash said that a huge crowd was rushing towards the Radio Station. The guards were immediately asked to close the entrance gate and tightly secure it. The mid-day transmission was on. We were in the lawn outside, waiting and watching. The huge crowd raising anti-Radio Kashmir slogans reached the gate. They tried to break it with the sticks and rods they were carrying. The gate did not give way. Then someone in the crowd in a loud voice cried, "*Don't waste time. Come all of you. Lay your full weight against the fencing, come on.*" The entire human wall of the crowd kept putting their full pressure on the wooden fencing. And after a few efforts the entire fencing, in spite of the iron support, gave way and collapsed. The entire crowd rushing in, started searching for the Director, uttering all kinds of cuss words, blaming him for not closing the station and in spite of the tragedy, broadcasting a *chhakri* and that too, by Zoon Begum. We pleaded that it was a *naatia chhakri*. But nobody would buy

our clarification. They wanted the Station Director. Some of us covered Khwaja Mohammad Yusuf and pushed him away from the crowd. His short height saved him.

Getting irritated, one among the crowd, apparently the leader, shouted, "What are you waiting for? Set the building on fire. Bring the petrol can here. Give it to me." But luckily, the can was empty. The man slapped the youth who had handed over the empty can to him cursing him for not filling it when exhausted. He saw the diesel drum near the Generator Room. They had some torn *namda* pieces with them. There was little diesel in the drum. They soaked the felt pieces of the *namdas* in it and then tried to inflame it. But it did not work. Then somebody shouted. "*Run to that petrol pump across the ground.*" Some of them ran with the empty can. The crowd was restive and began to break windows and pull down the wires of the mast in the ground. We were worried about the safety of the staff on duty holed up in the studios inside. My wife Shanta was the announcer on duty, presenting the programmes. You can imagine what my mental condition must have been. In that multitude I noticed quite a few boys who used to sell tickets in black outside the cinema hall that they had just gutted. I noticed another familiar person, the *chowkidar* of India Coffee House. He had a long pole in his hand and with it was quietly breaking one glass pane after another. Even the fluorescent tubes fixed over the porch of the studios were not spared. They were waiting for the petrol that was to be their fuel for the fire.

Tension rose when someone from the crowd said, "They are coming!" Every one turned and saw the boys who had gone to fetch petrol, returning. The huge crowd was uncontrollable. The telephone lines were cut. The Station Director had skipped through the crowd and gone to his office to ring up the Police Control Room. But there was no trace of any help coming. We feared that once the supply of petrol came, nobody would be able to save the studios and the staff inside. But as God had willed it, a contingent of the militia that was rushing past the Radio Station bound for somewhere else, saw the crowd. The officer commanding it, ordered the soldiers

to rush inside the premises and drive away the crowd. But when the crowd did not move away even after many warnings, he opened fire and shot the first round into the air. The crowd got frightened and dispersed. The officer and the jawans ran after the fleeing rioters. We heaved a sigh of relief. It was a sight to see the boys, who were returning with the petrol can, throwing the can there and running for their life. The young Kashmiri officer was Lt. Rather from the J&K Militia, which we came to know after he came back after chasing the miscreants away. It was the decision that he had taken on his own initiative, which had saved the Radio Station and the staff holed in. We thanked him with all our heart. He apologized and excusing himself at that moment said that he had to rush to Lal Chowk where he was supposed to reach.

While recalling that fateful day I ask myself a question; Wasn't it the same crowd, those very people, who had come to save their Radio Station when some years earlier it had caught fire? Hadn't a similar mob rushed into that inferno and through the collapsing ceiling brought out that huge transmitter and pitched it in the same ground? Since it was Radio Kashmir, their very own Radio Station - what had changed now? This needed introspection because this question must be haunting every sane Kashmiri professing to be the standard bearer of *Kashmiriat* watching the collapse of the values we once had stood for great pride.



FEBRUARY 4: THE HOLY RELIC FOUND

January was a month of terrific tension. There were continued demonstrations and protest marches throughout the valley. The appeal broadcast from the Radio Station by the new state Prime Minister Shama-ud-Din had no effect because he had no hold even over the people in his own constituency. It became a joke because we had kept on repeating the same appeal over and over again as no other appeal was forthcoming from his office. In fact, the entire system had collapsed. But hats off to the *Kashmiris* who, like during the days of the *Qabaili* raid of 1947, stood together and there was not a single communal incident anywhere. The only violence that had taken place was on the first day. After that day, people themselves came out to stop further acts of arson. *Kashmiriat* withstood this grave challenge too. It was a sight to see how Kashmiri Pundits helped their Muslim brethren in running the community *langers*. It was a catastrophe for everyone. The new leadership was helpless. Bakhshi Sahib, who could have done something, was away in Delhi. The entire country was shaken. The reports in the news papers were disturbing every mind. The Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, in his address to the nation, appealed to the people to remain calm. In that address he said that Bakhshi Sahib was going to Srinagar and he was sure that the situation would be soon brought under control by him and the Holy Relic of the Prophet would be retrieved soon.

Hearing that Bakhshi Sahib had arrived in Srinagar, we, in the Radio decided that we must rush to his official residence and try to record an appeal from him. But the Station Director, Khwaja

Mohammad Yusuf was a staunch follower of rules of protocol and suggested that it would be proper to go to the State Prime Minister first and asked him to fix an appointment for us. So, we, along with our recording engineer went to Shams-ud-Din's official residence on Gupkar Road. The gate was closed. There were surprisingly only a couple of security men guarding the gate. On telling them that we had come from the Radio they asked us to wait. After a little while, they let us in. There was nobody around, except Kashi Nath Aima, the private secretary of the State Prime Minister along with one more official sitting leisurely in the veranda. On greeting us, he informed us that Shams-ud-Din was with Bakhshi Sahib at his residence and we could meet him there. We therefore hurried there.

The entire area around the Private Office was blocked by surging crowds shouting slogans, "*Moo-e-Muqqadas Dhoond Ke do. Asli mulzim ko pesh karo. Naar-e-Taqbeer Allah-u-Akbar.*" There were army jawans all around. We did not know how to reach the gate. Fortunately, the Inspector General of Police, coming out, saw us struggling to reach the gate. He signalled to the guards to let us in. We were guided to the official residence of Bakhshi Sahib which was adjacent to the Private Office. There were a few party workers helplessly standing in the drawing room. One of them went in to inform Bakhshi Sahib that we had come to record his message for broadcast. After a little wait, Bakhshi Sahib entered and sat to record but the slogans outside, that had subsided a little, again erupted, louder than ever. Bakhshi Sahib stood up, went to the window opening on to the road outside, and moved the curtain a little. The sloganeering went on unabated. We waited. So did Bakhshi Sahib. The slogans died for a while and we started recording. Within a few seconds the outburst of slogans again reached us louder than before. We hadn't seen Bakhshi Sahib so upset. He kept on mumbling, "This can't go on. No, it has to stop!" Shams-ud Din, wrapping a woolen blanket over his *pheran* came into the room from within the house. Seeing him enter, Bakhshi Sahib curtly asked him to go back and relax inside. When the

slogans did not stop, Bakhshi Sahib asked us to wind up and go, assuring us that he would come to the studio later on and record there.

It was late evening of the same day when Bakhshi Sahib came to our studio to record. Needless to say, his address to the people was very well-worded and highly emotional, and it did have a soothing effect. But the protests and demonstrations continued till 4th February, 1964 when the Holy Relic was finally found in a grove of willows in *Hazratbal* itself.

After that there was a great rejoicing, but it did not last long because rumours were afloat that the relic found was not the original. With doubts spreading like wildfire, the protests and the agitation again paralyzed life. This phase was taking on an uglier turn. The disturbances again became a grave worry for the centre. Finally, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru asked Lal Bahadur Shastriji to go to Srinagar and handle the situation to the satisfaction of one and all. It was the wisdom of Shastriji that, without any waiting he formed a committee of religious heads, political leaders and respected citizens who had been having the 'Deedar' of the relic for so many years of their life, to identify the genuineness of the relic. Even then the masses were not satisfied till at last on the initiative of Lal Bahadur Shastriji the great Islamic Saint and scholar of Kashmir, Syed Mirakh Shah Sahib was requested to identify and check the genuineness of the holy relic. It was he who gave the final verdict that the relic was indeed genuine and after his decision there was no scope for any further doubt.

Before his return to Delhi, Lal Bahadur Shastriji held a press briefing in the Srinagar Guest house and I went to cover it. I remember the moving words in which he expressed his gratitude to the people of Kashmir for the unity of mankind they had shown when such a big tragedy had occurred. I remember how his voice choked while saluting the people of Kashmir. To the pressing question whether the culprits had been found, he replied that investigations were on and the culprit would soon be found. While talking he had marked that we were looking at the overcoat he was

wearing, which was too long and big for his size. So before winding up he looked at us with a smile and innocently said, "This overcoat is not mine. While I was about to leave for the airport Punditji told me that these were the days of the severest cold in Kashmir, and had asked if I had taken my overcoat with me. I had none and I told him so. Without a word Punditji had gone into his room and got it for me. I myself feel it a little odd, but in it I feel warm and comfortable. It covers even my feet." He gave another smile looking at us and left the room. Sorry to say that the truth about the disappearance of the Holy Relic is shrouded mystery even up to date.

Khwaja Shams-ud-Din, after the tragic incident of the theft of the Holy relic, resigned on 27th, February. In fact, on his appointment as the Prime Minister of Jammu & Kashmir, Dr. Karan Singh's remark to us before the oath-taking ceremony began was really an event to be recorded for posterity. As there is nothing to talk of Khwaja Shams-ud-Din's contribution to the government, he did enter the annals of Kashmir history as the last Prime Minister of Jammu & Kashmir, that's all.



KHWAJA GHULAM MOHAMMAD SADIQ TAKES CHARGE OF THE GOVERNMENT & HOME MINISTER, GULZARI LAL NANDA'S VISIT

After Sham-ud-Din's resignation, Khwaja Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq was duly elected as the leader of the house and took charge of the government and it was during his tenure that the nomenclature of Prime Minister was changed to Chief Minister along with some other historic changes. It was during those days that Gulzari Lal Nanda, the Home Minister of India had come to Srinagar to take stock of the political situation. A great Gandhian throughout his life, sincere and honest, ever-caring for the common man, Gulzari Lal Nanda desired to talk to the people of Kashmir through the medium of the radio. While expressing this desire, he also sent the script of his talk.

Shri Nanda was staying in Nehru Guest House. So it was decided that the talk would be recorded there. When I contacted his P.A. for an appointment, he asked us to come at 11.30, the next morning. So we reached Nehru Guest House, situated in the lap of the *Zabarvan* Mountain overlooking the mesmerizing Dal Lake, earlier than the scheduled time. The Home Minister's Personal Assistant met me in the lobby and said that the time of the recording had been changed to 3 o'clock in the afternoon. He apologized for the change and expressed regret that we would have to make a second trip.

I thought going back to the Station and then hurrying back here wouldn't be worthwhile keeping the distance in mind. Hanging around there in the guest house too would not have been proper. Seeing that I was in a fix, our good old driver Abdul Aziz suggested that the nearby *Chashma-e-Shahi* would be the best place to relax

till 3 o'clock. That was exactly what we did and after getting refreshed, we were once again there in Nehru Guest House a little before the scheduled time. Nanda Sahib's personal secretary was waiting for us. He led us straightaway to the Home Minister's room. When I entered and looked around, I felt that there was nobody in the room. I suddenly heard Nanda Sahib's voice bidding me to enter. I walked in and saw him sitting on the carpet resting his back against the bed with a clipboard on his knees writing something. I waited. He finished and got up. The recorder with the extension cables had been fixed in the lobby outside the room. When he asked me to sit and sat himself down too, I took out the script he had sent and handed it over to him. He kept it aside saying, "No. This will not do. I have written a fresh one. That is why you had to come again. I had a revelation this morning. I gave a slip to the security people in the last hours of last night and told the driver to take me to *Gulmarg*. It was early dawn when we reached a village ahead of *Tangmarg*. I saw in the early morning light some villagers walking towards the running brook that flowed along the road. I told the driver to stop and got down. I walked and reached the group of villagers who had finished with their washing and *Wazoo* and were readying to go the mosque in the village. I greeted them and led them into a conversation. Taking me as one of the tourists it took a little time for them to open up. Or it might have been that someone amongst them had recognised me. So they had all turned articulate. When I asked them which political party was dominant in their area, the reply was a revelation. One of the older men said, "*Ham to sabhi ke sath hain Sahib. Party worker log aatey hain member bananey ke liye. Char anna membership hai. Ab dekhiye Leader to Sher-i-Kashmir hain to unki party Mahazi Raishumari ka member to banna hi hai. Vohi woker doosri jeb se Mauli Farooq Sahib ki party ki parchi nikal kar bharvata hai. Woh to Hamare Mirwaiz hain. To char aane bharke unke bhi member bante hain. Ab lijiye Sadiq Sahib ki PartyCongress ki membership. Unki Hukoomat hai. Roz Koi na koi kam to unse nikalwana to hota hi hai. To unki party ka member banna bhi to zaroori hai.*" He had not yet finished,

when another villager came forward and said, “*Sahib ham ne ek hi baar paisa kharch karke woh deodhy banake rakhi hai sirif ooper ka banner badalte rahte hain. Sheikh Sahib aayen to Sheikh Sahib Zindabad ka banner lagta hai. Sadiq Sahib aayen to Sadiq Sahib Zindabaad ka kapra lagega. bus aisa hi chalta hai Sahib.*” (We are with everybody Sahib. Party workers come to make us members of their respective parties. Membership fee is just four *annas*. The fact is that our leader is Sheikh Sahib. So we have to become a member of his Plebiscite Front Party. The same worker takes out another membership form of Mauli Farooq Sahib’s from his other pocket and makes us fill it. Now look here Sir. He is our Mir Waaiz, our religious head, so we are obliged to be a member of his party. Now comes the turn of Sadiq Sahib’s (Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq) Congress party. It is his government. We need his help for our day to day problems. So it is essential that we become members of his National Congress party too. Sir, we have spent some money once and for all and have constructed that gate there. We have just to change the banner. Sheikh Sahib comes and we put up a banner saying Sheikh Sahib zindabaad! Come Sadiq Sahib and up goes a similar banner of Zindabaad in his honour. That is how it is sir.”)

Gulzari Lal Nanda, after recounting the conversation he had had with the Kashmiri villagers, said, “Everybody had been giving us the impression that this was a backward area, so politically immature. The earlier script I had sent was written with that idea in mind. It really was a revelation. The common man here is extremely intelligent and politically more mature and awake than anybody else. So I had to talk to people who were quite mature. People who knew much more than what we in Delhi thought. Hence, the changed script!”



RADIO KASHMIR SHIFTS TO THE NEW STUDIO

1964, though quite eventful as far as the political scenario of Kashmir was concerned, was auspicious for Radio Kashmir Srinagar: we got new studios. For succumbing to the dictates of the state leadership in power, to change the scheduled programmes especially on Id that year, the Station Director Khwaja Mohammad Yusuf had to bear the consequences. He was transferred to All India Radio, Delhi and a more experienced officer Shri Nand Lal Chawla was posted at Srinagar. It was a boon for Radio Kashmir Srinagar because it was because of the dynamism of Nand Lal Chawla that the construction of the new studios whose foundation had been laid by Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad on 6th June 1960 was accelerated. The premises of the new studios were originally an orchard, belonging to the State Agriculture Department which was given on lease to the Government of India. It had already taken more than four years in construction. So, credit for getting the construction completed quickly goes to Nand Lal Chawla.

This new station was inaugurated on the first day of April 1964. The Union Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Dr. B .V. Keskar was be present on this auspicious occasion. To commemorate the event the prestigious Akashvani Vadyavrind (The National Orchestra) had travelled from Delhi to give a couple of performances in Srinagar. We were happy that we now would have our regular studios. I was thrilled that now I shall have my own full-fledged Drama Studio with an Effects Room, an echo chamber and a mixing and editing room equipped with the latest gadgets. With experienced and dedicated Chawla Sahib as the head, Radio Kashmir Srinagar started a new chapter.



THE BATTLE OF HAJI PIR

After the tragic incident of the theft of *Moo-e-Muqqadus*, Kashmir had had hardly six months' breathing time when a much bigger challenge was thrown by Pakistan. Ninth August was approaching which was the day on which Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah had been arrested. This day had been observed as a day of protest by his followers since the year of his arrest. Handbills were pasted everywhere urging people to participate in this big protest march. Banners had come up at many places in the city. But, just on the eve of the day of protest, news came in that the procession had been cancelled. As such, activities had been creating some tensions for us in the Radio for since the tragic events of 1964 we were relieved after getting this news. But no one expected that a volcano was simmering beneath the scenes which could erupt any moment. Reports were coming in that Pakistan was trying to repeat 1947's misadventure. A strong rumour was afloat that armed infiltrators had already sneaked into the valley and were lurking in the out skirts of the city. It was rumoured that their leaders in the garb of ordinary civilians had met the leaders of the Plebiscite Front in *Mujahid Manzil* and had outlined their plans before them. We came to know about this later on. Their plan was that their '*Mujahids* in civilian clothes would join the procession on 9th August and then start a civil war targeting the police and the army. It was the wisdom of the Kashmiri leaders that they did not let it happen by cancelling the 9th August procession. The evil designs of Pakistan were thus defeated. It became a known fact later on that it was the wisdom of Maulana Mohammad Sayed Masoodi

who had told his colleagues that our defenseless people would be caught in this gun battle and would probably get unnecessarily killed for nothing. Besides, there would be devastation all around, and Kashmir would turn into a battlefield which would kill everything that Kashmir had stood for from times immemorial.

The rumours of infiltration had already alerted our defence forces who started intensive combing operations especially in the area between Gulmarg and Batamaloo. The Kashmiri masses turned highly vigilant and assisted the defence personnel in trapping and rounding up infiltrators. It was a sight to watch those so-called *Mujahids* who had been caught. The condition of these hapless Pakistani soldiers in ordinary grey *Malasia* cloth *salwaar* and shirts wearing ordinary canvas boots was pitiable. They were in hundreds. We were asked to start a programme through which these imprisoned soldiers could send messages of being alive and being treated well in captivity to their families in Pakistan. This job was assigned to Bashir Butt Abdul Rashid and me. The recordings were done in our Emergency Studios in the *Badami Bagh* cantonment area. I was quite a few times driven to tears, when they, in trembling voices recorded their messages and begged their relatives to pray for them. These poor blindfolded soldiers had been told that the Muslims of Kashmir were being butchered by Indian infidels and that they were going on a '*jihad*' to save them. They had been told that they would be welcomed everywhere with garlands and would be well-fed. And once here, they were waiting for their doom.

I can never forget one of them who lost control and cried when I asked him about his family. He had hardly got leave for the last three years and had a one-year old daughter, when he had been sent to the Punjab from his village in Baluchistan. "She must be four now." Would you like to record a message for her?" I asked and added, "What is her name?" He lost control and began shouting, "*Us ka naam mat lo. Us bachi kob beech main mat lao.* (Don't take her name. Don't bring that child into this mess.") He was crying and I could see tears rolling down his cheeks through the cloth that

had been tied over his eyes. I could not keep a record of the number of people whom I had recorded. The number of these so-called *Mujahids* who had surrendered was so large that it was not humanly possible for me to record them all. So Bashir Butt and others too had been assigned this job. This exercise continued for many days.

This was clear from the grilling of the captured officers and soldiers of Pakistan that our army came to know that many more infiltrators and thousands of soldiers were being inducted through the *Pir Panchal* Range. For this, the *Haji Pir* mountain pass was the easiest and shortest. So, our army earmarked the bulge near Uri on the Ceasefire line which had the *Haji Pir* pass in it. The plan was to straighten the bulge and capture control of the *Haji Pir* pass to seal this infiltration route. So, under the command of Brig. Bakhshi, the job was assigned to the 68 Infantry Regiment which launched an attack. It was a big challenge for us too in Radio Kashmir Srinagar, because Pakistan had launched other fake radio stations besides their *Trad Khal* so called Azad Kashmir Radio to spread a tirade of false and malicious propaganda which had to be forcefully rebutted based on truth and reality on ground. After launching the attack the Army Commander had invited the press to give a briefing of the attack launched from Uri on *Haji Peer* heights. Bashir Butt went with the press party to Uri to record the press briefing there. He prepared a detailed Radio Report for broadcast. Everyone felt glad that the route facilitating infiltration would now be sealed.

When the news came that the *Haji Peer* pass had been captured, our Station Director N. L. Chawla and I went to cover the report about the operation. General Swarup Singh Kalan was the G.O.C with head quarters in Baramulla. We went first to Baramulla to record him. The victory of *Haji Pir* was a great achievement. After recording some details of the operation he took us to show the huge stock of arms the fleeing Pakistan army had left behind. From there we went to Uri and stayed there for the night.

We left for the *Haji Peer* Mountain Pass early in the morning. This was the old trade route starting a little distance from Uri

going right up to Poonch. It was a sight to see hundreds and hundreds of Kashmiri labourers busy in widening this narrow road that had not been developed till then. The credit for this mammoth task being completed before the end of the war goes to Ghulam Rasool Kar, the dynamic Congress leader who had organised a force of two thousand labourers and masons to not only widen the narrow road but also to rebuild the culverts which had been blown up by the fleeing Pakistani Army, to stop the advancing Indian Army. We stopped at a couple of villages and interviewed quite a few villagers. Talking to them gave me a feeling that we were talking to some tribesmen ignorant of what was happening around. There was not a young man seen anywhere nor a woman or a child. We were told that in the threat of the advancing Indian army young men along with their families were asked to vacate the area and leave the older men to look after their homes and the standing maize crops. The people had been kept so ignorant all these years that they thought that they were still being ruled by the Maharaja. Their sustenance depended on the corn and its flour. They had forgotten the taste of sugar and not even seen a doctor for ages. They were wary of the Pakistani police who would keep pestering and looting them on one pretext or the other. They said that these policemen would suddenly land there when the time for harvesting arrived and would take away a major portion of the produce. They seemed so distressed that they went on narrating stories of their miserable plight nonstop without waiting for our questions.

It was around 11 o'clock in the morning when we reached *Haji Peer's* grave under the shade of a big tree at an altitude of some eight thousand five hundred feet around which hundreds of inverted *madanis* (wooden churners) of all sizes were pitched in the ground. Lots of colourful strips of cloth were tied into knots around them by passing shepherds and cowherds seeking the blessings of their patron saint. The victorious contingent of our army had established its picket in the big solitary *Gujjar Kotha* (the shepherd's flat-roofed hut) near the *mazaar*. We were warmly greeted by a young Sikh soldier who was introduced by Brig. Bakhshi, along with whom

we had travelled from Uri as Major Ranjit Singh Dayal, the hero of *Haji Peer*.

We had taken him as one of the soldiers as nobody wears his pips in the battle field. Brig. Bakhshi had briefed us about the details of the operation which was basically to capture this area of *Pirpanchal* mountain range, which was the main infiltration route. He said "The assault had started from the beginning of the old road to Poonch from Uri. There was no resistance right up to *Agivas* village. The area was completely deserted and the local intelligence reports were that the Pak Army had retreated towards *Haji Pir Top*. So, our army, in spite of the narrow road, was marching ahead. But when it had reached the gorge of *Agivas*, heavy gunfire broke out from the *Gujjar Kothas* situated on top of the ridges. Guns from both sides started pounding our soldiers as they were stuck in between the two ridges. The gunfire was coming from a considerable height. As we had suffered heavy casualties, we were forced to retreat carrying our dead and wounded soldiers with us. We saw while retreating, that behind the camouflage of the corn stalks there were *pucca* concrete bunkers from where they were attacking us.

Back in the base camp, we sat to formulate a new strategy. Finding the concrete bunkers in the vanguard meant that they must have built stronger defence systems on the rear posts. So it was advisable to do a reconassain through the mountain features in an area on our side of the old *Poonch* route to assess the ground reality. It was Major Dayal who volunteered to take some men with him, equipped with some fire arms and ammunition, to undertake this task. After his offer was accepted, he set out on this risky mission from Rampur, quite a few kilometers before Uri. Weather was getting bad. That is why we were worried and waiting. But the wait was not long. It was the morning of 28th August that we got a message from him that he had captured *Haji Pir Pass* and needed reinforcements and some rations. We thought he was joking considering his jovial nature. But he assured us that it was a fact. He in fact was talking from the top of *Haji Pir* itself. He shall now

tell you how he had achieved this memorable victory," concluded Brig. Bakhshi.

Major Dayal's narrative was hair-raising. He narrated how he had led his small group, up the heights of the western range of mountains above the Rampore village which was a tough vertical climb through a dense forest. The cloudy weather had helped them keep their movement unnoticed. "When we reached the top I suddenly found that we were at a height above *Haji Pir Post*. I could through my the field glasses see a group of Pakistani soldiers loitering around there. I ordered my men to lie low and crawl down the height till we would reach a spot from where we could bring them into our shooting range and wait till the clouds thinned a little and the Pakistani soldiers came closer to each other. Soon we got the chance. I ordered my men to fire. The guns continued the fire as they were hitting the right target. We saw them running helter-skelter as they had been taken by surprise. We had inflicted quite a few casualties as we saw them dragging some bodies away. We at the same time continued crawling down to get closer to them. They were now firing back at us without any success." Major Dayal continued and told us that some more soldiers had come to their help. But they were not many. Seeing them helplessly seeking shelter and not being able to face our gunfire, he had launched his final assault.

"After a short but fierce battle we captured their post. Almost all the enemy soldiers had been killed. And a few of them who had saved themselves vanished into the gorge below. After capturing their post that they had established in this *Gujjar* hut near the grave of the saint, we scanned the area around, waiting that their reinforcements would come. But there was an absolute lull throughout the night and even in the morning. There was no movement even from the Uri side." Major Dayal concluded the narrative describing the morning scenario, "Weather was no better in the morning. I took stock of the situation. They had left some of their belongings behind, even their mugs, plates, utensils etc. Though there was no further resistance, even then I got a gun fixed

here on the roof of the hut where we are sitting. I was standing here, when my gunner opened fire. I was about to lose my temper when he pointed to that hut in the jungle. There was a Pakistani soldier aiming his gun at me. Before he could have taken me, my man, without my orders, opened fire and killed him. Well, it was the only resistance left from the enemy." That was how *Haji Pir* was captured.

Maj. Dayal then took us round. Distant firing was still being heard. He explained and said that there was only one picket left between *Haji Pir* and *Poonch*. The sound of the guns is coming from there. That post too would be cleared and then this road could go straight from Uri to Poonch.

But then who knew what was lurking in the womb of Time? It was later on no surprise that the Pakistan Army had left very few troops at *Haji Pir*. First of all they probably had not expected that their scheme of infiltration would fail and we would launch an attack from Uri. Secondly their country was preparing an armed intrusion in the western sector to launch a massive attack to cut off roads leading to Kashmir which became clear later on. As Major Dayal was still establishing the post there, the jawans had started a temporary kitchen and had prepared a meal for us too. As they did not have many utensils, they served us lunch in the plates that the Pakistani soldiers had left behind.

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INDO-PAKISTAN WAR OF 1965

It had been reported by the press that it was not only *Haji Pir* that had been designed as an intrusion route to stealthily enter Indian Territory. Pakistan was planning a bigger adventure. While they were busy pushing the so called *mujahids* into Kashmir they had at the same time moved their Patton tanks into the *Rann of Katch*. And on the 6th of September, 1965, they had also moved into *Chamb* in the *Akhnoor* sector of Jammu, which led to a more powerful retaliation from the Indian Army resulting in a full-fledged war. This was a big challenge for the entire country and for us too in Radio Kashmir. Besides thrusting a war on India, Pakistan had launched a massive disinformation campaign through its legal and illegal propaganda machineries. We had effectively defeated their purpose through our programmes during the *Haji Pir* operation that had strengthened the conviction and morale of our people. But this was a full-fledged war and we had to change the strategy of our broadcasts in accordance with fast-changing developments. For this we had to deviate from the normal schedule of our broadcasts.

We put our heads together because this was a bigger challenge. I must record here that it was due to the experienced leadership of Nand Lal Chawla that we were able to devise and produce excellent counter- propaganda programmes. He had a unique style of initiating one into some original thinking. He would never dictate but would encourage us to express our ideas without any pause or hesitation. Once satisfied he would give full freedom for that idea to be executed.

The most effective vehicle to pass on correct information with the required effect has always been features, short plays, sitcoms, parodies, caricatures, humour and satire. The charge of such programmes was naturally given to the Drama Section. So I immediately started to plan and produce programmes like *Wotal Buji* in Kashmiri and revived the tested Urdu satirical *Machhihata Theatre* and a series of features on the fast changing scene on different war fronts where operations had spread. Programmes like *Wotal Buji* and the caricatures created of different Pakistani military dictators in many features became highly popular. These daily features written at breakneck speed blunted the enemy's propaganda machinery and at the same time gave listeners a picture of the correct situation. These programmes were supplemented and strengthened by songs in Kashmiri and Urdu written by Farooq Nazki, Kamal Ahmad Siddiqui and other lyricists on our staff. These songs, composed by Virender Mohan and Nassrullah Khan reflected the sentiments of our nation on the one hand, and on the other, emphasized the beating that the Pakistan Army was being subjected to, on different fronts. As the scenario was changing every minute our entire team was working almost round the clock.

The credit of the success of all these programmes goes to my colleagues Pushkar Bhan, Som Nath Sadhu, Kamal Ahmed Siddiqui, Farooq Nazki, and Bansri Nirdosh who would create magic through their satirical writings and voice caricatures of the military leaders of Pakistan. It was a joint endeavour in which radio actors, musicians, scriptwriters, effects men, engineers etc, were involved. Everyone, especially the listeners, was all praise, because these programmes helped them cope with those unpredicted times of tension. Even Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who was then the Minister for Information & Broadcasting in Lal Bahadur Shastri's cabinet, and who had come to Srinagar to see the situation for herself, came to our station to thank all of us personally for the commendable job we were doing.

The 1965 war continued till 23rd September when our forces had reached *Ichogal Canal* on the outskirts of Lahore and were

about to enter Lahore. It was then that the super powers intervened and a ceasefire had to be ordered by both the countries. With it, the temper of our programmes too had to be toned down. Political parleys started which finally led to the meeting of the Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastriji and Field Marshal Ayub Khan, the then President of Pakistan in Tashkent in Uzbekistan, with the involvement of both the United States of America and the Soviet Union where the treaty of peace i.e.. The Tashkent Agreement was finally signed. According to the Tashkent Agreement, hostilities were to stop and the areas conquered were to be vacated and handed over back to the other side. Besides, all propaganda against each other had to be immediately stopped. It was in Tashkent itself that Lal Bahadur Shastri passed away, and that too, in mysterious circumstances. It was one of the gravest tragedies in the political history of our nation. In these maneuverings of big powers India had become a dismal loser in every respect. We had lost one of the most honest and sincere leaders, our Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastriji. Besides that, we had to give back quite a few areas which were important for our security and which we had won. The territory included the entire *Haji Pir* territory which had been the cause of a lot of tension and still was, being the nearest track for infiltration. We had not only returned the area neglected by Pakistan for those eighteen years, but also with a wide and developed road with rebuilt *pucca* culverts that the Pakistani army had destroyed while fleeing.

The changeover in our programmes too was a big challenge. Our Ministry had sent instructions that there should not be any kind of hostility towards Pakistan in our programmes. So all the programmes recorded during the war had to be minutely scanned and set aside to be erased later on. Fresh programmes had to be created and recorded for fostering peace and goodwill with Pakistan. At the same time, we had to maintain the remarkable popularity that Radio Kashmir had attained, intact. While doing so I feel proud that Radio Kashmir did rise to the occasion and its popularity despite these strictures, continued to increase, day after day..

VADI KI AWAZ

As mentioned earlier, it was the suggestion of N. L. Chawla, that we must not in any case lose the listeners for the popular time chunks that had been created by programmes like *Votal Buji* and *Machi Hata Theatre*. As it was peace time now, we had to think of introducing a programme in Kashmiri in place of *Votala Buji*, which would be of public utility and deal with the day-to-day problems of our people. And one programme in Urdu addressing the listeners in Pakistan and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir which would impart information to them about the developmental works that were being carried on in Jammu & Kashmir along with other states of our country was required. But it needed to have an element of entertainment too to make it popular. For planning these programmes a small committee comprising Bashir Butt, Pushker Bhan, Som Nath Sadhu, Farooq Nazki and me was formed. It was through the deliberations of this group with Shri Chawla that two programmes which later on created history were born. One was *Zoona Dab* and the other, *Vadi Ki Awaz*. The stock characters of these programmes soon became household names, especially Agha Saeb, Moma Picha, Aga Bai, *Jaggeir Pension* and others from *Zoona Dab*. *Munshi Allah Rakha* and *Nikki Aapa*, and *Shanta* of *Vaadi Ki Awaz* too became popular, not only with our listeners but also the listeners in Pakistan and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. I helped in the production of both these programmes in the initial stages. When they got established they were handed over completely to the remarkable duo Pushkar Bhan and Som Nath Sadhu. I handled the programme *Vadi Ki Aawaz* too, a daily

programme including the recording of its signature tune and the opening announcement, which is still being used.

The credit of the resounding success of this programme goes to Umesh Kaul, Banshi Nirdosh, later on joined by Ghulam Nabi Ratanapori (now a former Member Parliament) and P. K. Kher who were the writers of this programme. Credit for its popularity should also go to Kedar Sharma (munshi Allah Rakha and Uma Khosla (Nikki Aapa) and to Shanta Kaul whose Listeners' Choice Programme became a salient feature of this programme which kept on creating nostalgia in the minds of the listeners in Pakistan by including old popular film songs and *ghazals* in it. This programme came handy later on in the '71 War also to blunt Pakistan's propaganda.



EFFORTS TO FREE THE VALLEY OF FLOODS

After induction of the Indian National Congress in Jammu & Kashmir, the nomenclature of Prime Minister and Sadr-e- Riasat were changed to Chief Minister and Governor respectively as it was in the other states of India and Khwaja Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq was sworn in as the first Chief Minister after Shams-ud-Din was forced to resign. He held the reins of the state from 1964 to 1971 (when he passed away in office). The amount of a solid and far reaching developmental work undertaken by him, had unfortunately not been properly projected by the state publicity agencies during his tenure, and not even after he had passed away, most probably because, he, as the most honest leader, was not hungry for publicity.

One of the major tasks he had undertaken was to get the bottlenecks that hindered the speed of the flow of water of the river Jhelum removed, which was the main reason for incessant floods in Kashmir. The place of the main action was at *Khadenyaar* from where the river flows out of the valley. Along with the press party I was invited by the state government to see the great engineer of *Laltaditya Muktapid's* time, *Suiya's*, dream being realized. *Suiya* had surveyed the entire course of the river *Vitasta*, our *Vyeth* and found that the main bottle neck was due to heavy rocks in the river-bed at *Khadenyar* where all the silt and muck was getting deposited. It was because of this bottleneck that the current of the water was very slow outwards. This resulted in the river getting swollen in the valley, hence the floods. To save the valley from getting inundated persistently, Sadiq Sahib had given top priority to this problem.

Suiya had thrown sacks and sacks of gold coins into the river here, as the legend goes, to tempt the people around to jump into the water to dig out the gold from the bottom of the river. In this way he got the silt and muck too cleared along with the gold coins enabling the river to flow smoothly.

That was hundreds of years ago. It was this part of our history that had laid the blueprint for the engineers of the 20th century. The plan was to blast all the huge rocks into small pieces on the river-bed at *Khadenyaar*, and the blasting was in progress when we were taken there. Before that, we were taken to *Beonyaar*, an important village on the banks of the *Vitasta* midway between Baramulla and *Khadenyaar*. Here the river was making a big loop around the landmass. This too naturally slowed the flow of the river. While recording interviews with the engineers there, I was amazed to know how this loop was straightened, keeping the vastness of this project in view. It was a sight to see how the river flowing so lethargically earlier, now rushed forth like a mountain stream.

Another difficult task was to divert the river's course its water to other directions to empty its bed at *Khadenyaar* so that the rocks got exposed and were then blasted. On finally reaching the gorge at *Khadenyaar* where the operation was in full swing, we were amazed to see mountains of silt on both banks of the river which now had almost no water in it. It was really a Herculean task that had been accomplished. We couldn't imagine that there was such a mountain of silt which had now been deposited on either side of the river, accumulated there choking the river all these years.

The river bed was very deep now. From the top we could see the residue of the blasted rocks. The bed was being cleared of the stones that had accumulated there, because of the blasting of the rocks. The blasted rocks had created small waterways and fairly big puddles in which quintals of big *Mahaseer* fish were holed up by the receding waters. A group of fishermen, obviously from the nearby *Sopore* area, with big nets, were harvesting this god-sent Aquarian crop and selling it at throwaway prices to the people

watching, up on the banks. I had not seen that big *Mahaseer* fish in my life nor had the people around. This fish travels upstream in summer to escape the heat of the plains to this part of Kashmir. That is how these schools of fish were stuck there now.

Blasting off the bottle neck at *Khadenyaar* was not the only work that Sadiq Sahib's government had taken up to save the valley from the havoc of floods. To augment this project, plans had been drawn to dig a second flood channel along the western side taking excess water away from the city through the *Magam* bridge beyond *Shalateng*.

One would ask then why did the city of Srinagar get submerged in 2014? It was because of our carelessness. The flood channels have never been dredged for almost forty years. On the contrary we have been dumping all the waste and muck the city has been producing in them. Secondly we have not taken care of our bunds. Big rodents had burrowed into them making them porous and weak. In Kashmir's history, dredging of the river Jhelum had been undertaken at the behest of Maharaja Hari Singh. But never after that! His dredging equipment was rotting in the lawns of *Lalmandi Bagh* for a pretty long time. It was because of the steps taken during Sadiq Sahib's time that we did not have floods for a long period in Kashmir.

Recollecting Sadiq Saib's time, I cannot forget the long interview I took of the great Dr. K.L. Rao who was the Minister for Irrigation & Power at the centre at that time. He had been requested by Sadiq Sahib to give him a workable plan for power development in the state. An authority on water and power management, Dr. Rao had given him both long and short term plans. In the interview he had laid stress on mini power projects. His conviction was that since every district of Kashmir had been blessed with enough of perennial mountain streams and rivulets, these rivulets, if harnessed would make it possible, for every district to have its own powerhouse. These mini power generating projects would not take a lot of time in execution. In this way every house every small industrial unit and handicraft centre would have heating systems even in winter.

This would increase productivity. Then he had talked about the bigger projects and their feasibility. But alas! Sadiq Sahib who had this dream and Dr. K. L. Rao who would have fulfilled it did not live long enough to see that dream become a reality.



1971 WAR WITH PAKISTAN

The 1971 war too was a challenge for us in Radio Kashmir. The revolt in East Pakistan, (now Bangladesh) and the exodus of thousands of refugees escaping and entering India finally had resulted in a full-fledged war between India and Pakistan when it launched air attacks on our airports in the west including Jammu and Srinagar. The situation was more alarming than that of 1965. Kashmir had, for the first time, experienced its onslaught from air. So we had to plan a more aggressive campaign. I was again given the charge of preparing on-the-spot programmes which would be in tune with developments happening on both fronts of the war.

In order to boost the morale of our people and the fighting forces, martial as well as entertaining songs were being written, composed, and immediately broadcast. For this we had engaged the state military band to augment our own orchestra. The wing of Drama Studio and the adjacent Music Studio had turned into a sort of a factory workshop from where skits, features, talks, and songs were churned out every fifteen minutes and broadcast without a break. Everyone was working nonstop and with missionary zeal.

Radio Kashmir's Srinagar studios too were one of the targets of the air raids by Pakistan. So, trenches were dug in the lawns which could give shelter if enemy planes did succeed in their mission. This was a precautionary measure. But as our studios were situated almost at the foot of the *Shankracharya* hillock, swift diving and low sweeping of the Pakistani Sabre jets would have been fatal for the flyers. That was how our Radio Station got saved.

Another precaution we had taken was that our broadcasts should

not stop in any situation. For this we recorded our programmes in duplicate for simultaneous playback from our emergency Studios that had been built in the Badami Bagh Cantonment and our studios near the Tourist Centre. Programme officers were deputed there along with engineers by rotation to look after the broadcasts in case of any emergency. My turn too came a few times during the war.

■■■

DEMISE OF KHWAJA GHULAM MOHAMMAD SADIQ

December, 16th 1971 was inauspicious for Kashmir also on another account. It was 16th December when we got the sad news from *Chandhigarh* that the great leader, freedom fighter and our Chief Minister Khwaja Ghulam Mohammad, who was undergoing treatment in the P.G.I there, had breathed his last. The entire state was stunned. It was a great loss for us, his political disciples, and all those who believed in his sincerity, honesty and immense love for his people. Needless to say, it was a personal loss for me.

War was on. So the seat of the head of the government could not be kept vacant. Therefore the Governor Shri Bhagwan Sahai, invited the seniormost minister in Sadiq Sahib's Cabinet, Syed Mir Qasim to take oath of office of the Chief Minister. It was a dark and dreary night when A.L. Maini and I, along with the recording engineer, Jameel Bakhsh, drove to Raj Bhawan. There were hardly any people there, except those belonging to the governor's staff. The Governor had flown in from Jammu to fulfill this constitutional obligation. When we were led to enter the reception hall, there was gloom all around. Very few lights were on. The Governor, his Personal Secretary and Qasim Sahib along with Manohar Nath Karihaloo were the only people there. We fixed the mike and the oath taking ceremony started; probably the shortest and the gloomiest ever oath-taking ceremony I remember ever having recorded. The Governor, in his brief introduction said that it was a constitutional obligation that there should be at least one more minister who is a member of the assembly to be sworn-in to form the Cabinet. That was why Shri Karihaloo too had been sworn in

along with Syed Mir Qasim. No sooner was this ceremony over than the then Police Chief almost rushed in, extending his hand to heartily congratulate Mir Qasim. But Qasim Sahib rebuffed him saying, "Don't you realise we are in mourning?"

The day of the funeral was fixed after Sadiq Sahib's body was received in Srinagar and it was decided according to his wishes and his family's decision that he should be buried in his ancestral graveyard in *Batamaloo*. War had taken a serious turn since our army had entered East Pakistan. It was in that crucial period that the funeral of the departed leader had to take place. We had decided that we would broadcast a running commentary on the funeral procession next day from *Buchwara* in the *Gagribal* area where Sadiq Sahib was residing to the cemetery in *Battamaloo*. It was therefore decided that all the arrangements for the coverage should be completed during that night itself. So, along with Jameel Bakhsh, the engineer in charge of outside broadcasts, carrying our night curfew passes, I drove to the *Battamaloo* cemetery to fix the spot from where we could conveniently cover the burial.

It was pitch dark as street lights had been put off to avoid exposure of the city to any air raid during the night. To check the telephone lines for our connection with the studio, Jameel Bakhsh switched on his torch and directed its beam on the overhead telephone post. It was a grave folly. As soon as the light went up, a warning signal blared. Gunfire would have followed the signal resulting in our getting caught in the fire. But we had the army guard from *Battamaloo* itself with us who signalled back, assuring safety. That was how we were saved and warned that we should not repeat this folly ever again. That was the situation in which the departed leader, a true son of Kashmir was going to be given a farewell.

It was a sight, to see thousands of mourners thronging the lanes and bazaars of the city of Srinagar rushing towards the residence of Sadiq Sahib. Mir Ghulam Rasool Nazki, Ali Mohammad Lone, Abdul Rashid, Abdul Haq Burq and I were to cover the funeral procession from Sadiq Sahib's residence to the cemetery at

Battamaloo. When this procession of thousands of mourners started moving through the road leading to the Dal Gate area, Ali Mohammad Lone took over as he belonged to that area and could give the description of life in that area and Sadiq Sahib's association with it and the people living there, vividly. Nobody could have expected such a huge crowd waiting on either side of the road as a fierce war was on with every danger of an air raid.

The procession of the unprecedented crowd reached *Gandhi Park* (where the High Court buildings now stand) before noon. The huge ground was already half filled by people who had to join the *Nimaz-i- Jinaja*. It had taken the mourners' procession quite a few hours to reach there, as people from every direction were coming and joining it. At that time when the *Nimaz-i-Jinaza* was being offered, the hoot of the air raid siren was heard. It was followed by the drone of the Pakistani Sabre Jets coming from the direction of the airport. It was followed by the booming of anti aircraft guns. Immediately after the gunfire, there was silence. I was expecting that people would get scared and would even disperse. But to my amazement, nobody moved till the *Nimaz* was over. Meanwhile the all- clear call of the siren too had been heard. So, the funeral procession moved towards Batamaloo.

The contingents of the army and the police were already lined up there. The buglers bugled the last post and Sadiq Sahib's mortal remains were buried with full military honours amidst the tears of the thousands of his admirers gathered there. With that, an important chapter of Kashmir's history had come to an end.

The Indo-Pakistan war ended with the defeat of the Pakistani army in East Pakistan and the surrender of its army on the 6th of December, 1971 after just sixteen days. For about 14 days we had forgotten our homes and were working day and night to cope with the fast changing scenario of the war as we had to keep people fully informed and at the same time we were trying our best to keep their morale high as we had started nonstop broadcasting during that period. A Herculean task indeed! It was a boon that my house *Pragash* was just across the *Zero Bridge* hardly a kilometer

away. And at many times food would come from there for me and my team. But it was frightening too, because our *Migs* and the Pakistani *Sabre jets* had got engaged in dog fights a few times just over our area in Raj Bagh. During one of these dogfights a heavy shell had fallen with tremendous force on the house of Sheikh Amin, our neighbour a couple of lanes away from our house. Another shell had fallen on the ground floor veranda of Dr. A. K. Kaul, the eminent dental surgeon's house in adjacent Jawahar Nagar while the Governor of J& K, Shri Bhagwan Sahai was being treated in his clinic there.

War on the western front continued for some time even after the surrender of the Pak army in Bengal. It was again on the intervention of the big powers that ceasefire was declared. Pakistan had lost its East Pakistan wing and Bangladesh was born as a free country. Finally, on 2nd July, 1972, the Shimla Agreement was signed. That was again a big problem as we had in 1965, to reschedule our programmes to herald our victory and an era of peace, which always is a million times better than war.



BAKHSHI GHULAM MOHAMMAD PASSES AWAY

We in Radio Kashmir did not have time to even breathe after the signing of the Shimla Agreement by Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Zufikar Ali Bhutto. Unfortunately for Kashmir, we had to plan the coverage of another funeral procession. It was the early morning of 15th July, 1972 that Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad, '*Budshah-i-Sani*' passed away. The mighty Chinar had succumbed to the fury of time. He had no ailment. He had got up early in the morning, had taken a bath, offered *nimaz*, dressed for the day and suddenly had suffered a massive heart attack. That was the medical report released to the press and radio.

The jubilation which had started to be the tone of our programmes after the Bangladesh victory had to be suddenly changed to mourning. This had happened so suddenly that everyone was shocked. A. L. Maini, who was holding the fort in the radio after Nand Lal Chawla, and I, along with a few colleagues, went immediately to Bakhshi Sahib's private residence to pay homage to the departed leader and to organize the venue from where the running commentary had to start. There was an unending chain of people filing past the bed on which the body of Bakhshi Sahib was laid. I moved a little aside from where I could watch him. He was fully dressed in his favourite *Shervani* with his usual *Karakul* cap adorning his head. With his eyes closed, he looked as if in deep sleep. There was peace on his face. What a great death, a memorable farewell to a great leader whose word was law for almost a decade.

Thousands and thousands of men and women joined the procession. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, the rich and poor, his followers

and his adversaries were there, chanting the reality of redemption *La Illaha-Illalah* and wading their way along with the procession right up to his ancestral burial grounds.

I had left the procession half way as we had to send our recording teams to different areas to record people's messages for the late night programme of tributes. This included the comments of the VIPs who had been recorded at the cemetery. Though the Kashmiri saying goes '*marith martaba*' (To shower lofty praises on one after one's death) it can in no way apply to Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad. The praises that were showered on him were the sentiments of gratitude. Was there any aspect of development that he had not taken care of? Education, health, roads and bridges, rural development, eradication of poverty, transport, tourism, horticulture and sports, all had his stamp. And everyone mentioned it all in the programme which was edited and presented that very evening of his death.



1975:

SHEIKH MOHAMMAD ABDULLAH'S RETURN

The political scenario of Kashmir changed after the defeat of Pakistan and the Shimla Agreement. Mrs. Indira Gandhi tried to strengthen the peaceful situation in Kashmir. For this, mending fences with Sheikh Sahib was of utmost importance. So, parleys between Sheikh Sahib's closest colleague and confidante, Mirza Mohammad Afzal Beg and G. Parthasarthy a seasoned diplomat representing the centre, began. These discussions went on for months and finally an agreement was signed in February, 1975. After this agreement Syed Mir Qasim, who had majority in the Legislative Assembly, was requested to resign, which he gracefully did, in the larger interest of the country, so that Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah could be sworn in again as the head of the government.

Sheikh Sahib was thus sworn in as the new Chief Minister on 25th February 1975 in Jammu after which he, along with Mirza Afzal Beg and his carefully chosen cabinet colleagues came by road to Srinagar. It obviously was a great road-show, one of the greatest in Kashmir. Our News Correspondents accompanied his motorcade from *Qazi Gund* to Srinagar. In Srinagar, a *pandaal* had been built on top of a couple of big buses exactly on the western side of the historic *Lal Chowk*. It was beautifully decorated, for the reception the people of Kashmir were going to accord to their leader Sher-e- Kashmir. Along with the recording engineers I was there to cover the function. We were given space on the stage from where I could see right up to the end of *Partap Park*. The entire area was filled with crowds from the city and also from different villages. This historical agreement was considered a big

achievement that would bring a new dawn in the state, if implemented in the true spirit of the word. Everyone was waiting for the '*Lion of Kashmir*'.

After a long wait the pilot jeeps came into view. We started recording with my commentary describing the scene and the excitement around. The density of the crowd was so thick that it took nearly an hour for the procession led by a bus on top of which I could see Dr. Farooq Abdullah sitting among a few volunteers with a movie camera shooting this historical event. I was reminded of the huge crowd in the same *Lal Chowk* with the huge banner of Sheikh Sahib on a horse on the wall of the then *Palladium Cinema* as the backdrop, filling every nook and corner of the huge area, when Sheikh Sahib had returned after presenting our case against Pakistan the invader, in the Security Council. I was reminded of the scene in the same *Lal Chowk* when both Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah pledged an everlasting friendship between Kashmir and the rest of India that would guarantee a bright future for the people of the state. Making the listeners remember those historical events helped me cover the time till Sheikh Sahib and his Cabinet Members came on to the stage. When finally Sheikh Sahib stood up and waved to the crowd the tumultuous exuberance and deafening slogans of "*Sher-i-Kashmir Zindabad !*" it was a scene to be believed.

As far as I, while writing after more than four decades can now remember, it was Mirza Mohammad Afzal Beg who spoke first about the salient features of the agreement he had signed with G. Parthasarthy. After that, Sheikh Sahib introduced the members of his cabinet individually and said that he had kept two things in mind while searching for them. The first was honesty and the second was talent and capability. I remember how he showered praises on the great engineer Sonam Norbo who was India's ambassador in Mangolia at that time and whom he had motivated to quit from there and join his team.



SHRI DURGA PRASAD DHAR PASSES AWAY

The decade seventy was inauspicious for the country as a whole and for Kashmir in particular. First, we lost Khwaja Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq, then Bakhshi Ghulam Mohammad and it was now Shri Durga Prasad Dhar. There was political turmoil in the country. The situation was changing fast. Mrs. Indira Gandhi had lost the Allahabad High Court Case filed by Raj Narain on 12th June, 1975. She had appealed to the Supreme Court, which had turned it down. It was in this precarious situation that we received the shocking news that another great son of Kashmir, one of the most dignified politicians and diplomats of the country, D. P. Dhar, who was a second time Indian Ambassador in Russia, had passed away. This was the third jolt that death had given to the people of Kashmir. His body, still in Delhi had to be cremated in the land of his ancestors, Kashmir. So we had again to plan the coverage of this tragic event of lamentation. We planned everything that was needed for the broadcast of a running commentary and were waiting for his body to reach Srinagar.

Meanwhile, we had sent our teams to record tributes of eminent citizens, political leaders, writers, painters and other people who were associated with him. I went to Taal-e-Manzil Palace to record Dr. Karan Singh's tribute. Doctor Sahib was shaken by this tragedy. He said it was a personal loss for him and paid glorious tributes to D.P. Sahib, his personality, his polished diction of English, his art of winning friends, his great diplomatic acumen which he used in getting the Indo-Bangladesh treaty worked out, and his role in the

Shimla Agreement. Dr. Karan Singh said he was in a hurry - otherwise one could speak for hours about that lovable person. I remember what he told me while hurrying out of the room. "Sorry I have to take a flight to Delhi. This Allahabad verdict and the Supreme Court decision in Indiraji's case is disturbing, I don't know what is going to happen. I have to go to Khir Bhawani first to seek her blessings, before flying to Delhi."

The next day, D. P. Sahib's body was flown from Delhi and lay in state at his residence where thousands had assembled and were lining past it\ paying homage. After a few hours the funeral procession started from there and waded its way towards the city on its journey to the cremation ground at Karan Nagar. I had started the running commentary from *Gupkar Road* and continued till the mourners reached near our studios. From there, I handed over to the next point at *Regal Chowk*. The crowds were surging from every part of the city to join the procession. I crossed the Zero bridge and rushed towards Lalmandi Hazoori Bagh road to Shamshan Bhoomi at Karan Nagar to resume the commentary on the last rites there and finally the cremation.

It was extremely difficult to reach the entrance of the cremation ground as the crowd was pushing from all sides to have a last glimpse of their leader. So I had to leave the jeep much behind and almost pushed my way into the cremation ground. The O.B. team of engineers had established contact from Regal Chowk to Hari Singh High Street from where Manohar Prothi had taken over. After finishing there, he had to rush to the cremation ground to assist me. When the engineers saw me coming, they heaved a sigh of relief. When I looked around I was surprised to see hundreds of Muslim women, most of them in veils sitting a little distance from the pyre. The entire cremation ground was jam-packed. There was commotion and everyone around became restive as the state band preceding the *Arthi (cortege)* of D. P. Sahib was making its way into the *Shamshan Bhoomi. (crematorium)*.

As the pallbearers brought the body closer to the pyre for the last rites, the crowd of the ladies there wailed and beat their chests.

Many V.I.P.s from Delhi, State Cabinet Ministers and prominent citizens were sitting on one side. After sometime, Sheikh Sahib joined the mourners. I was already on air trying to give every detail to the listeners. I saw Sheikh Sahib slowly walking to the pyre on which the body of D. P. Sahib was to be placed. After laying a wreath on it, Sheikh Sahib stood motionless there, looking at D. P. Sahib's face and in Sheikh Sahib's eyes, tears were brimming. He could not hold back his emotions for long and almost broke down. While describing this memorable scene I too got a lump in my throat. Death had burnt all grievances and differences they might have had during their political careers. After all, D. P. was the young student whom Sheikh Sahib had groomed over decades.

I had lost count of time. The engineer, who had the telephone link with him, passed on a slip to me, saying that Manohar Prothi, who was supposed to join me, was held up in the crowd and it was impossible for him to reach the cremation ground. So, I had to cover the entire cremation ceremony myself without a break. It was a challenge and I did carry on for nearly two hours without a break. Whatever knowledge I had of the Hindu scriptures came handy and later on everyone said that I had not failed the challenge.



SHEIKH MOHAMMAD ABDULLA'S DESIRE TO CARRY THE CULTURE OF HIS STATE TO EVERY PART OF THE COUNTRY

After the new cabinet started working in the very first meeting of the General Council of the Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Art Culture & Languages, Sheikh Sahib, as its President, said that national integration can be effectively achieved through the cultural integration of different states of the country. He directed Akhtar Mohiudin, the Secretary of the Academy to discuss with Ali Mohammad Lone the Deputy Secretary and me, as a member of the General Council representing Drama and Theatre and plan a good play portraying the life of any class of Kashmiri Society for the Kashmir Festival that had been planned to be held in Bombay the same winter. Ali Mohammad Lone offered to write a play on the fishermen of Kashmir with *Vular Lake* as the backdrop. That is how *Jheel Bula Rahi Hai* came into existence. This Urdu play was one of the main attractions of the Kashmir Festival in Bombay (now Mumbai).

As already said, Radio Kashmir Srinagar had been giving support to many of the cultural events of Kashmir by allowing its staff to participate in them. It allowed them to travel with the cultural troupes of the Cultural Academy to different parts of the country and even abroad. That is why one should not be surprised to see 'Courtesy Radio Kashmir Srinagar' suffixed to the majority of actors, director, writer, music director and singers in the credit titles of the first feature film *Mainzi Raath* or feature film *Shair-e- Kashmir Mahjoor*. Even the songs for films and operas like *Vitasta* were recorded in the studios of Radio Kashmir Srinagar.

It was because of this interest in the development of Kashmiri

culture and its promotion in the rest of the country that Radio Kashmir Srinagar and the Directorate at the Centre, allowed me to get associated in this mission and to direct the above mentioned films as well as the stage play *Jheel Bula Rahi Hai*, operas, *Vitasta*, *Himala Ke Chashme*, *Piya Baaj Pyala* and *Tipu Sultan*, which were staged in different states of the country in the years 1975-76-77-78-79 during the Kashmir Festivals there. The credit of the success of these productions was due to the efforts of Mohammad Yusuf Taing, the then Secretary of the Jammu Kashmir Academy of Art Culture & Languages. It was not only his intuition and deep study of the culture of the entire state that he became the guiding factor in the execution of these ambitious programmes that got high acclaim in all the major cities of the country where they were presented.

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah would personally patronize these festivals and would become part of them. I am here tempted to insert some extracts from the speech Sheikh Sahib made in Kamani Auditorium, Delhi, in 1979 while welcoming Shri Neelam Sanjiva Reddy the President of India then, who had come to watch the famous opera *Piya Baj Pyala*, based on the love story of Quli Qutub Shah, the King of Deccan and the enchanting danseuse Bhagmati who laid the foundation of the city of Hyderabad.

“Your Excellency, I extend a hearty welcome to you on my behalf and on behalf of the J & K Cultural Academy, which has organised to-day’s programme. I extended this invitation to you on the phone when I was in Hyderabad. You have obliged us and we are grateful..... Jammu & Kashmir is the lone state which has embarked on sending cultural troupes and holding of exhibitions of its arts and crafts in different parts of the country to achieve national integration. Last year our artists went to Lucknow, Patna, and Calcutta. This year they have completed a successful tour of the Southern States..... Their main shows were held at Hyderabad, where an exhibition of our tourist industry, handicrafts, horticulture and paintings of our artists was also held. This was liked immensely by the people of Hyderabad. I strongly believe

that the vastness of our country makes it imperative for us that we should create opportunities to come closer through the medium of art and craft. This year our troupe presented a programme about Mohammad Quli Qutub Shah and Bhagmati in Hyderabad. This revived the memory of the people of Hyderabad and they were enthralled. One of our young singers Shameem Dev rendered a Telugu devotional song with such polished accent that she was awarded a gold medal by the T. T. Devasthananam Trust..... One more trouble you may kindly take for us, is to release a portfolio of rare masterpieces of the Kashmiri School of Calligraphy which our Cultural Academy has published. The Academy has gathered these specimens from temples, tombstones, mosques and manuscripts. This album does not include specimens of Arabic and Persian Calligraphy alone, but it is also adorned by some Sharda specimens..... Besides, there is an inscription in the portfolio which has been placed by the great Conqueror –King *Sultan Shahab-ud-Din*. This describes the efforts that the Sultan made to restore this temple to its original glory. This is an eloquent testimony to the fact that communal amity has always been in the blood of the people of Kashmir..... Even today one can see Sanskrit inscriptions, side by side Arabic, on tombstones there. Kashmiri Pundits became great scholars of Persian and Urdu too. Today language has become associated with religion, but Kashmir never adhered to this practice. When Gandhiji visited Kashmir in 1947, he was impressed by the atmosphere of amity prevailing there and exclaimed, “I see a ray of light coming only from Kashmir.” We had to undergo the tribulation of the 1947 aggression. But we never succumbed. We were at that time almost friendless, but we did not divorce our principles. India, subsequently, came to our rescue. We have resolved that we shall shed our blood but we shall not surrender to the dark forces of hate and fear.”



EXTRACT FROM THE SPEECH OF THE PRESIDENT, SHRI NEELAM SANJIVA REDDY ON THIS OCCASION.

“Sheikh Sahib and friends, it is always a matter of pleasure for me to be associated with anything which is connected with that beautiful land of Kashmir. From Kashmir to Kanyakumari, we are one nation. This great country cannot be divided on caste or communal basis. When the country progresses, each one of us progresses and lives. Kashmir, under the guidance of Sher-i-Kashmir is marching ahead which is a great joy for me. I always say that Kashmir is a shining example of all that is good, beautiful and noble. It is the laboratory of communal amity. Last year also I had seen a cultural programme from Kashmir. I am happy that this time they have arrived in Delhi after performing in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra. It really was much more necessary to visit these far off places than places nearer Kashmir. This will help foster greater understanding between various states and the people of this vast country. I am glad that Sheikh Sahib is spreading this message. In fact he is doing the same noble job that Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal did.Just now I have released an album; *Sheeren Qalam*. When I saw inscriptions published in it, I was overjoyed to see the scripts and cultures married happily on a single tomb stone, Sanskrit, in the Sharda script and Arabic. This is an inspiring message for the whole of India. This will be a revelation to many in the country that a Muslim king, hundreds of years ago, had repaired a Hindu temple and inscribed so on its walls, in Sanskrit. I also witnessed this wonderful programme about Bhagmati and Quli Qutub Shah and Andhra. I heartily congratulate Sheikh Sahib, the artists and the organizers of this beautiful show.”

It was because of the success of the above programmes of which

EXTRACT FROM THE SPEECH

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I was part that Sheikh Sahib had once again developed a liking for me which was there when he was The Prime Minister of the J& K state and was also holding the charge of Information & Broadcasting before 1953.



NAND LAL CHAWLA'S VISIT TO KASHMIR AFTER HIS RETIREMENT

It was because of being a staunch supporter of Mrs Indira Gandhi during the Emergency as her favourite man in Doordarshan, Nand Lal Chawla, the dynamic broadcaster, had to lose his job. But when Mrs Gandhi came back to power he was appointed Director-General of The Indian Institute of Mass Communications. One evening, I got a call from him saying that he was in town for a couple of days and would be staying with Syed Mir Qasim at his Barzulla residence. Qasim Sahib had become a great friend of Chawla Sahib when he was posted here. He, even as the Chief Minister, would come to meet Mr. Chawla in his office in Radio Kashmir. Having great regard for Chawla Sahib's caliber as an excellent media person, I had kept in touch with him even after he had been transferred from Srinagar on promotion to Delhi. It was a pleasant surprise when I got his call, I told him that I would be there in the morning.

I parked my car outside the gate and slowly opened it to check whether the security men were around, so that I could send in a message to Chawla Sahib that I had come. There was nobody there and I ventured into the lawn. I heard Qasim Sahib's voice. "Come, Come." I turned around and saw Qasim Sahib sitting in the veranda of the ground floor with a somewhat familiar person. I walked to the veranda and recognised the man sitting with Qasim Sahib. It was Comrade Abdul Kabir, a great fighter for the rights of the working class. Undaunted, he had struggled and was still struggling for them in spite of jails and tortures. I greeted both of them. Qasim Sahib offered his hand and made me sit and said a little sarcastically,


"How come, you are here, today. O! You must have come to see Chawla Sahib. He has gone for a bath. Must be coming."

Abdul Kabir turned to me and continued the conversation he seemed to have been having with Qasim Sahib and said, "I was telling Qasim Sahib that his completely withdrawing and sitting aloof is not going to help the people." Qasim Sahib replied, "Circumstances were such that I got frustrated. When negotiations with Sheikh Sahib were going on, I got a message from him that as Dr. Farooq (Dr Farooq Abdullah) had wound up in London to help us here he will need some place to stay. He has some savings. He says that he has seen a house in Gupkar Road. It is some evacuee property. Please see and help him. He will compensate the Government. So I sent word back in response that I would check and then come back.

When I asked the concerned revenue officials to check, I was told that there was a long stretch of land attached to the said bungalow which was on the foothill of *Shankeracharya* hill and was a huge property. This situation made me uncomfortable. So I talked to Indiraji on the phone about it. Do you know what she told me? '*Dekhiye Qasim Sahib ab jab ki Sheikh Sahib ke saath faisla ho raha hai, de dijiye.*' Comrade Abdul Kabir argued, "You *did* allot it to him. And after that you handed over even the Government to him. I know it all. But that does not mean that you should resign from everything!" Qasim Sahib replied, "Look at this house of mine - it is a simple two-storey structure like those around here. Don't you remember that these very people had floated the news that thousands of eggs had been used in its construction? They had even named it 'Anda Bhavan' - remember?" "I know but that still does not answer my question." Qasim Sahib replied, "The Janata Dal Government collapsed because of its own weight and new elections had been announced. So, as an important member of the Congress Working Committee I had thought it my earnest duty to give advice for the strategy that we should follow. Indiraji has always valued my opinion. In my letter I had suggested that we should keep the hotheads in the Youth Congress at a distance,

keeping in mind the misadventures in Old Delhi and in Turkman Gate and should keep the Youth Congress slightly in the background. That would help etc., etc. I was here in Srinagar and did not know what was happening in Delhi behind the scenes. I did not know that command had been taken over by Sanjay Gandhi and all the letters were handled by him. So what do you expect might have happened? I was rebuffed. Well, that was reason enough to call it a day. I have remained a true Congressman so I could not become a turncoat. So I thought it better to withdraw from the scene."

I do not know how the conversation ended as Chawla Sahib came down and led me to the drawing room inside. Needless to say, Chawla Sahib too had been disillusioned. While talking of the days he had spent in Srinagar he became nostalgic and said that that had been the most satisfying period of his career. I told him that he had always been a source of inspiration and we had learnt a lot from him. He, in his typical style, said, "To be honest, on the contrary, it was I who had learnt so much from you all in Radio Kashmir. I would always tell my colleagues in A.I.R. that if you have to go through the mill to become real broadcasters, ask for transfer to Kashmir." This he had earlier too written to me in one of his letters.



SHEIKH MOHAMMAD ABDULLAH NEVER CAME TO RADIO KASHMIR SRINAGAR STUDIOS TO BROADCAST

Sheikh Sahib had a grudge against Radio Kashmir. It was probably because of the mishandling of our public relations which had been many a time lop-sided. The reasons for it became clear later on. All India Radio started a programme *Apni Dharti Apna Desh* (My land, My country) for the National Programme. The series was meant to inform and educate listeners about the culture, way of life, and the progress the different states were making in the country. These programmes had to be relayed by all stations simultaneously. Every programme had to be introduced with a message from the Chief Minister or the Governor of the respective state. So we wrote to Sheikh Sahib about the importance of the programme and requested him to record his message. In addition, I rang up Mr. Ghulam Ahmed, Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister, who was a fan of mine, to pursue the matter.

After a few days I got the script of the message. I again rang up Mr. Ahmed and asked him about the date and time of recording. He said that Sheikh Sahib had said that they could ask somebody to read it. I requested Mr. Ahmed to talk again to Sheikh Sahib and convince him that it was the message in his own voice that would carry the spirit of the message. He, after a couple of hours, called back and told me that Sheikh Sahib did not wish to come to the studio. I told him that I shall come and record him there at his residence. Ahmed Sahib told me that he will not record it even there. Thus disappointed, we wrote to the Directorate about the situation. The reply: "Then, record the Governor!" That was how much people in power in Delhi knew about the nuances of Kashmir

politics. (Sorry to write that they never cared to know.) Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah represented Kashmir, the Governor did not. This they realised when we wrote back. So I suggested that we should postpone the broadcast, wait and try again.

■■■

R. P. ITIGI REPLACES K. K. NAYYAR.

K. K. Nayyar, himself a popular broadcaster with a refined voice, who had a large fan following amongst Urdu-speaking listeners in India and in Pakistan, held the fort as the Station Director from 1976 to 1981. He had introduced many innovative programmes like *Mehfil*, music concerts with particular themes etc. etc. Categorized as outstanding Drama Voice - graded outstanding along with Melville de Mellow, Bhadro Banerji from Bengal, Vinod Sharma from Mumbai, your writer, and eight other broadcasters of the country, K. K. Nayyar was promoted as Deputy Director General and had to move to Delhi. He was replaced by R. P. Itigi from Andhra Pradesh.

Quite an unassuming gentleman, Mr. Itigi was a well known Telugu poet. He had more than adequate knowledge of Urdu literature too. Perhaps because of this, he had been posted here. I would not call him a great programme planner. But he had the knack of tapping the right talent and using it to the advantage of the organization.

A reminder from the Directorate, that the state of Jammu was still unrepresented in the National Programme *Apni Dharti Apna Desh*, was received from the Directorate again. Mr. Itigi asked me the reason for this lapse. I told him that Sheikh Sahib does not agree to record the opening message in his voice, and that was the reason. He agreed with me that without Sheikh Sahib's message the programme would not have the required impact. He told me that he too would try and would write a letter to the Chief Minister in this connection, which he did. But he got the same reply.

Frustrated, Itigi requested me to somehow get him an appointment with Sheikh Sahib. I contacted the Principal Secretary Ghulam Ahmed and told him that the new Station Director wanted to see Sheikh Sahib to pay his respects. Mr. Ahmed somehow got the appointment for us. Mr. Itigi was thrilled beyond words. We had organised a music concert in Tagore Hall on *Yaum- i - Habba Khatoon* and decided to request Sheikh Sahib to grace the occasion in our meeting, if all went well.

We were ushered into the C. M.'s Chamber by Sheikh Sahib's P. A. While taking our seats, Sheikh Sahib told me in Kashmiri. "Where is he from?" I told him that he belonged to Andhra Pradesh. Hearing the name Andhra Pradesh, the only words he understood, Itigi intervened, "Yes sir I am from Andhra Pradesh, from *Dharwar* to be precise. I had an opportunity of having your '*deedar*' before 1947 in *Gulbarga* when I was a student. You had come there to address a public meeting as President of the All States Peoples Conference." "That was ages ago." "Yes Sir, I was a very poor boy and could not afford a bus ticket but I had read your speeches and wanted to see you and listen to you. So I, along with a few other boys walked the whole distance from *Dharwar*. I can't believe Sir, that I am meeting you in person today. It is a dream fulfilled." I was watching the reaction of Sheikh Sahib. He seemed to be relaxed and said, "Good Old Days! Yes I remember the grand session of *Gulbarga*. We have recently been to Andhra. We had a Kashmir Festival there in Hyderabad. (Pointing to me) His troupe had put up a show there. So, you have travelled such a long distance from your home. The language barrier shall be a handicap in discharging your duty here." I spoke for Itigi and told Sheikh Sahib that Itigi was well versed in Urdu and had translated many Urdu poets into Telugu. After feeling that Sheikh Sahib was by now quite relaxed, Itigi extended his invitation and requested him to grace the occasion at the *Yaumi Habba Khatoon* function in Tagore Hall.

I was waiting for this moment with my fingers crossed. Hearing that we had come to invite him for our function, Sheikh Sahib's mood changed and he said that he had decided not to go to Radio

Kashmir or attend any of its functions. "As far as my government is concerned your station has always played a very negative role. It has constantly belittled the efforts my government has been making in bettering the lot of the people here. I have been listening to your news bulletins. I am small fry but even a small fry has some respect, some dignity. You, in your news, first tell the listeners that the government has started so many schools in even remote villages. So many health centres. But what is the news that immediately follows the news about the Government's efforts, is, that the President of some non-existent Old National Conference, some nonentity, had in a statement said, that the government had failed at all levels and in all fields of development. You give credence to a non-entity who sends you two lines written on a piece of paper. I know why it happens." I tried to explain and pleaded that we had many daily programmes which project the excellent work the government had been doing. Not only that we have been going to record on the spot wherever ever the projects were being executed and broadcast detailed features both in Urdu and in Kashmiri. These features dominated our daily programmes. News was being broadcast only for a few minutes. Sheikh Sahib, cut me short and said, "*Bas wahi kuch minute to aap ke sabhi programmes par paani pher dete hain.*" (Those very few minutes dampen the effect of all your programmes.) Itigi explained that the News Unit was under the control of the Central News Services Division at Delhi. "Even then I assure you sir, that I shall see to it that this shall not happen in the future and no news that contradicts the spirit of our programmes is broadcast without ascertaining the importance and the credentials of the source. Anybody acting in contravention shall not be spared, Sir!"

It seemed that Sheikh Sahib understood our position and changed the subject and asked, "When are you celebrating *Habba Khatoon's day* in Tagore Hall? We gave him the date. He called his P.A., and directed him to block it for Radio Kashmir in Tagore Hall. We were elated and more than I it had been Itigi who was successful in breaking the ice. While going back to the studios I

told Itigi that Sheikh Sahib was right. There had of course been some correspondents from the Directorate who had projected some political non-entities to gain favours. Such cases were very few. But carriers of tales had been polluting our relations for personal gains.

Anyway, Sheikh Sahib did grace the occasion in Tagore Hall. Not only that, he sat through the entire programme. That was a historic day for us all. A few weeks after that, Mr. Ahmed called me and said that Sheikh Sahib has asked me to convey to you that you could come to record the message for the programme *Apni Dharti Apna Desh*. I could not believe it. I left the day and time to be fixed by Mr. Ahmed.


It was a warm Sunday in August 1982. I do not remember the exact date when I went to record Sheikh Sahib at his residence behind the old Neadou's Hotel. I fully remember the small side room just near the entrance stairs of the house to which I was led along with Mr. Jameel Bakhsh the recording engineer. Sheikh Sahib was sitting in an easy chair basking in the sun that filtered into the room through the glazed windows. He was all affection and attention and even ordered *qahwa* for us. The room was small and Jameel had to squeeze into a corner to do the recording. When I handed over the script to him he looked at it and said, "So you have not really broadcast this programme so far?" I humbly replied, "How could we have without your message Sir?" "Am I that important?" Saying this, he looked at us and smiled as the *qahwa* was brought in. Sheikh Sahib told us to have it and till then he would have a look at the script. It was a delight to record him. He did not talk like an orator which he was and a great one as that. He read the script as if he was talking to the listeners and not lecturing them. That was the last recording Sheikh did for Radio Kashmir Srinagar.

It was the same year, 1982, the month September and the date the 9th, the doyen of Indian Politics, the tallest amongst the Kashmiri leaders, the Lion of Kashmir Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah left his mortal frame and millions of his followers wailing,

crying and mourning. I regret that I missed the honour of being a part of them as I had been sent by him to Bombay to find out where the negatives of the film *Shair-i-Kashmir*, *Mehjoor* were lying. This trip had come about because, after many years after the Kashmiri version had been released, the film, lying with the State Information Department, was screened for Sheikh Sahib when I had written a letter to him that something needed to be done about the release of the Hindi version. After seeing the film he was keen to see its Hindi version too finalized and released. I had been sent to Bombay to get things moving in this matter.

I was busy in the Bombay Film Lab. going through the huge library there, to trace the negatives along with Mr. Rajender Bhatia, Film Producer and late Balraj Sahni's secretary, when the sad news of Sheikh Sahib's demise in Srinagar reached us. It was a shock beyond words. We left the lab and went to Bhatia Sahib's house and tuning into Radio Kashmir Srinagar, listened to the running commentary on the funeral procession of that beloved leader of the people. The President of India, the entire Central Cabinet and the leaders of different political parties had come to join more than a million people who had arrived from all the parts of the state to bid farewell to him.

We went the next day to Bombay Lab and finally traced the negatives that had been very well preserved. (Credit must go to Bombay Lab which takes care of every foot of even the negatives.) I returned to Srinagar after a few days and gave the details to the state government. The Hindi version needed to include some old stock shots of the freedom movement in which Sheikh Sahib was seen addressing huge gatherings to impart authenticity to the film. It had been decided that the film needed some re-editing. What happened later on to the Hindi version is a different story with which neither Radio Kashmir nor I am connected.



ELECTION OF 1984-85.

After Sheikh Sahib's death, Dr. Farooq Abdullah was elected leader of the ruling National Conference in the Jammu & Kashmir Assembly and was sworn in as Chief Minister on September 11, the same year i.e. 1982. Two years passed apparently in peace till the elections of 1984 came up. The Congress party under the leadership of Mufti Mohammad Syed too was getting into the fray. He had motivated Mrs Indira Gandhi to visit Srinagar for the campaign. A huge gathering had assembled in Iqbal Park (old *Huzoori Bagh*) in which a huge stage had been erected on the Tagore Hall side. We were not supposed to cover the election meetings. But the Prime Minister of the country was addressing the people so we had to record it. Though we were not supposed to broadcast it we had to keep it preserved for the archives. So we sent a recording team there.

Now everyone in Kashmir knows what had happened there. A big gang of hooligans had infiltrated and were quietly sitting in the front rows till Mrs Gandhi rose to speak. The recording of the function was on when Mrs Gandhi started her speech. She had hardly spoken for a few minutes when cat-calls started coming from the audience followed by loud vulgar remarks. That was the beginning of a disturbance. After that it was a free for all. It turned into a fiasco. The recording engineers on duty rang us in the office and said that Mrs Gandhi had been escorted away from the ground and the political parties were fighting each other and that they had been caught in that crossfire. The van that had carried them there

had been sent back after leaving them there. "Please do something!" So, along with our security officer I rushed in the station transport via the flood channel bund and reached the road to *Bakhshi Stadium*. This area had been cordoned off. Luckily, Mr. Ali Mohammad Watali, the then Police Chief, noticed me waving. He hurried to us. He lost his cool and asked me what I was doing there. I quickly told him that our recording team was stuck in a corner of the stage. It was he who cleared the way for us and we hurriedly made our engineers get into the car along with the equipment and with the help of the police took the same Rambagh Flood Channel Bund road and reached the station. The staff which was still there in the Station Director's room was relieved.

After resting a little while, the recording team narrated what exactly had happened which I have written above minus the details of the recording. As they had done the recording till the turbulence had started, we were keen to listen to it. Mrs Gandhi had greeted the people of Kashmir and had narrated how deep Punditji's and her love for the land of their ancestors was, etc. Then the violent turmoil magnified by our microphone drowned her speech. The organizers were pleading and begging for silence with no response. Indira Gandhi's angry voice almost shouting could be clearly heard asking Mufti Sahib, "Yeh aap log mujhe kahan le aaye?"

Everybody knows what happened after that. Dr. Farooq Abdulla was dethroned after twelve members of his party defected and joined Ghulam Mohammad Shah's *Awami National Conference*. After this Ghulam Mohammad Shah was sworn in as Chief Minister.



ELECTION 1986

Mr. Ghulam Mohammad Shah's government did not last long because of communal disturbances beyond his control. His government was dismissed and Governor's rule imposed and fresh elections announced. During every election, every political party contesting or supporting another recognised party was entitled to two broadcasts of fifteen minutes each, from All India Radio stations which included Radio Kashmir Srinagar, according to the Chief Election Commissioner's directive. These broadcasts were part of the Election Canvassing Programme of the party concerned. I was in charge of checking and recording these talks. So we drafted the schedule of these talks and called a meeting of the representatives of all political parties to discuss the time schedules and the Code of Conduct issued by the Chief Election Commissioner. The only party which did not come for the meeting was the National Conference. Though the State People's Party headed by Abdul Ghani Lone wasn't fighting the elections it was canvassing for the National Conference and had joined the meeting. The date chart was finalized after a few changes.

So, much before the dates of the broadcast, the scripts started pouring in. We had no authority to make any change in the scripts sent by the political parties except to make sure that nothing was there in contravention of the Code of Conduct issued by the Election Commission. Before the broadcasts had to start, I had to go to Delhi to attend the Annual Meeting of the General Council of *Sangeet Natak Akademi*. On my return, the then Station Director Sardar Ratan Singh who had taken charge as Station Director, after

R. P. Itigi's transfer, told me that Mr. Abdul Ghani Lone, President of State people's Party, had come to record his speech which he had got done. He handed over the tape of the recording as well as the script to me.

When I went to the studio to check whether the recording was in conformity with the script, I was taken aback because there were many things, which were straightaway, against the election Code of Conduct both in the script as well as in the recording. I went to Sardar Rattan Singh and asked him whether he had read the script. "No. I thought that Lone Sahib was a seasoned parliamentarian and besides that I thought we had not to vet the script. So I had got it recorded." I told him "True, we had not to vet the script, but we had to check whether there was anything that was going against the Election Code of Conduct." I then pointed out to him that there were personal attacks in the script besides a few other portions which flouted the terms of the Code of Conduct. Sardar Ratan Singh now got worried and asked me what could be done. I said, "You request Lone Sahib to come to the studio to amend the script." But he could not muster the courage and I had to talk to Lone Sahib who knew me well and even liked me.

Being magnanimous, Lone Sahib came to the studio. I had kept the copy of the Code of Conduct ready for his ready reference. I gave him the script and pointed to the portions I had marked with a pencil. I requested him to first go through the Code and then see the portions I had marked. He graciously agreed. After going through the Code he read the portions I had marked, and without dither, asked for a pen and cut out the objectionable pieces. That was the character of that great man. He commented while amending the script, that the presence of the objectionable pieces would have definitely called for legal action. By deleting those portions, the script was falling short. He was thinking now of how to cover the time. I pointed out that he had not written much about his party's programmes. He got the point and completed the script. Thus the broadcast was recorded afresh.

After that he sent the script for the second broadcast after a few

days, which his next in command, had to broadcast. He rang me up and said that I would be happy as it was completely on our Economic Agenda. It is Kashmir's misfortune that it lost such mature leaders.



Dr. FAROOQ ABDULLAH'S ELECTION BROADCAST

When the actual broadcasts were to start I sent another letter to the National Conference reminding them that as the date approaching fast, the script was still awaited. The reply came that the National Conference was not interested in it. So when its date came, nobody turned up. The other broadcasts from the rest of the parties continued to go on air. Meanwhile, Dr. Farooq Abdullah who was not in Srinagar, returned. When we came to know about it, we sent a letter directly to him as he was the President of the National Conference, informing him that the date for the second broadcast too was approaching and it would be great if he came for the broadcast. His response was positive. After a couple of days he even sent us a script. We were happy and it became news for the press too. I remember the day. It was an afternoon when he came to the studio, accompanied by a group of the National Conference workers including a couple of his speech writers to record. I had received his script beforehand and had gone through it. It was a balanced script except that there were some grammatical mistakes which I had marked with a pencil. His followers kept standing around while he was going through his script, watching and waiting to see whether we had vetted any portion of the script. Farooq Sahib looked at his men and lost his temper on them, and said, "What have you been telling me that they must have drastically vetted the script?" One of them pointed to my jottings in pencil, "Sir mark what they have written in pencil." I butted in and told Farooq Sahib that these were a few grammatical mistakes I had found in the manuscript and made some suggestions. "Correct them

or leave them as they are, we have no objection.” He thanked me for pointing them out. He rebuked the sycophants standing around and told them that they had missed an opportunity and had let the precious fifteen minutes of his first broadcast - time go waste. I still remember when I led him to the studio for the recording how curtly he told them not to follow him, and stay there and wait for him. Needless to add, it was Dr. Farooq Abdullah’s National Conference which won a majority in that election and formed the government.



BIDDING ADIEUS TO BROADCASTING

It was in the same year, that is on 14th April 1985, the date of my bidding farewell to Radio Kashmir and All India Radio was fast approaching. Though a new beginning was waiting for me, I began to feel intensely the pangs of separation from an institution that I had grown with and had helped mature. It was an institution that was a great seat of learning, an institution where I had learnt through failures, where I had achieved whatever I had, through the love, cooperation, and affection of all my artists and colleagues. I was finally leaving an organisation that had given me the opportunity of knowing and reacting with great writers, musicians, dignitaries, great masters, and my own multitude of common men who taught me more than anyone else. They alone were my inspiration in creativity. And I felt amply complimented when they felt that I had not failed in reflecting their problems and their aspirations through my productions. They still remember that there was a man called Pran Kishore, their own Pranji, who loved his artists, his fans and was always waiting for their comments on his programmes and would even invite them for discussions that helped in raising the standard of our programmes. They say that Pranji was always there to find and encourage new talent and groom it. I am still there for them and a large number of them still keep in touch with me. What I owe to this organisation I can never repay.

Which other organisation would have given me a chance to travel through the length and breadth of my state and its borders from Thako Chak in Jammu to Gurez, Matchal and Tilel in Kashmir and Cheshul in Ladakh and project the life of the people there?

These travels provided me the opportunity of interviewing army generals like Genral Bhagat and General Jacob in the Northern Command in Udhampur, General Kallan in Baramullah, General Sethna in Nowshehra, and General Mahadevan in Leh, Ladakh. It gave me the opportunity to go as a nominated member of the International Jury Prix Italia XXX for Radio & Television held in Milan in Italy and made me a delegate representing All India Radio in the Prix Italia General Council.

I left with the sweet memories of the remarkable personalities with whom I had interacted in our *Mehfil* programmes. Numerous great personalities come to my mind while winding up this narrative. One was the doyen amongst the poets, Raghupati Sahai Firaq Gorakhpuri. What a genius! Kamal Ahmad Siddiqi in-charge of Urdu Spoken Word was in the recording booth recording and we were in the music studio interacting with Firaq Sahib in the *Mehfil* programme. When we asked him what he thought of modern day sensibility in literature and exposure in films, he replied, "*Main bhi husn ka pujari hoon magar husn aur apne darmiyan ek maheen parde ka qayil hoon. Us se husn dubala hota hai. Woh maheen parda hut jaye to husn husn nahi rahta.* (I too am a worshiper of beauty but I want a thin delicate veil between that beauty and me. Once the veil is removed, beauty remains beauty no more.)" This principle in fact applies to every form of creativity and it did guide mine too.

Another outstanding personality who graced our *Mehfil* Programme was Sardar Khushwant Singh. It was the tact of K.K. Nayyar that he agreed to participate in an Urdu programme. He said that it was his first ever Urdu broadcast. He was a little hesitant in the beginning but after some time opened up. While talking about his youth he heaved a deep sigh at a point and said that I was making him nostalgic. "I feel I am lying in my bed with my eyes closed and rewinding the film of my life." I got tempted to quote from Akhtar Sheerani's poem and said, "That great poet had very beautifully expressed such a situation in these words:

*Aksar shab-i- tanhai main, kuch daer pahle neend se,
 Guzri huyi dilchaspiyan, beete huve din aish ke,
 Bante hai shama-e-zindagi
 Aur latte hai roshni,
 Mer dil-e- sadchak par.*

(Often in a lonely night, a little before falling asleep,
 Past involvements, days of pleasure gone by,
 Turn into flickering lights of life and lighten up
 This shredded heart of mine, my very being.)

It had touched the sensitive mind of Khushwant Singh so much that he asked me to write it down for him after the recording was over, which I gladly did. He was writing a regular column for Hindustan Times those days and after a week or so he used those lines in one of his articles too.

I too almost every night, whether I am in Bombay or in Pune literally live these lines, before I go to sleep after a hard day's work. They sustain my life remembering those good old days of Radio Kashmir in the blinding glitter of glamour all around. Thus the beautiful memories of Radio Kashmir Srinagar shall always remain an indelible part of my life and am sure will also remain an important part of the memories for all those who blazed a trail in and for this noble institution.





Pran Kishore

Winner of SAHITYA AKADEMI AWARD

From the best selling author of 'Gul, Gulshan, Gulfam' & Sheen

This book is Pran Kishore's journey of thirty five years in Radio Kashmir and some other stations of All India Radio. Pran Kishore, who is one of the most dynamic and popular broadcasters, has skillfully brought to the reader's attention that the more unbiased a narration is, the more it engages you. As it advances, you are riveted to its pages, wanting to know more and more and more. Pran Kishore has written these memoirs like a novel, bringing, open and enclosed environments alive as he describes people, events and specific personalities with an eye for detail. Hair raising incidents that could have led to tragedy have been recorded in this book in such a way that will bring the readers very close to their own lives.

The fact that this book is a record of the establishment, growth and success of Radio Kashmir is only incidental. It actually is a record of life itself, a record that dexterously depicts events in all their dimensions and encompasses an enormous range of emotions. Through these pages you get a vivid picture of what social, cultural, economic and political changes had taken place and at what speed.



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